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MEDEA

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THE MEDEA

OF

EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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INTRODUCTION

The *Medea*, in spite of its background of wonder and enchantment, is not a romantic play but a tragedy of character and situation. It deals, so to speak, not with the romance itself, but with the end of the romance, a thing which is so terribly often the reverse of romantic. For all but the very highest of romances are apt to have just one flaw somewhere, and in the story of Jason and Medea the flaw was of a fatal kind.

The wildness and beauty of the Argo legend run through all Greek literature, from the mass of Corinthian lays older than our present Iliad, which later writers vaguely associate with the name of Eumêlus, to the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar and the beautiful Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius. Our poet knows the wildness and the beauty; but it is not these qualities that he specially seeks. He takes them almost for granted, and pierces through them to the sheer tragedy that lies below.

Jason, son of Aeson, King of Iôlcos, in Thessaly, began his life in exile. His uncle Pelias had seized his father's kingdom, and Jason was borne away to the mountains by night and given, wrapped in a purple robe, to Chiron, the Centaur. When he reached manhood he came down to Iôlcos to demand, as Pindar tells us, his ancestral honour, and stood in the market-place, a world-famous figure, one-sandalled, with his

pard-skin, his two spears and his long hair, gentle and wild and fearless, as the Wise Beast had reared him. Pelias, cowed but loath to yield, promised to give up the kingdom if Jason would make his way to the unknown land of Colchis and perform a double quest. First, if I read Pindar aright, he must fetch back the soul of his kinsman Phrixus, who had died there far from home; and, secondly, find the fleece of the Golden Ram which Phrixus had sacrificed. Jason undertook the quest: gathered the most daring heroes from all parts of Hellas; built the first ship, Argo, and set to sea. After all manner of desperate adventures he reached the land of Aiêtês, king of the Colchians, and there hope failed him. By policy, by tact, by sheer courage he did all that man could do. But Aiêtês was both hostile and treacherous. The Argonauts were surrounded, and their destruction seemed only a question of days when, suddenly, unasked, and by the mercy of Heaven, Aiêtês' daughter, Mêdêa, an enchantress as well as a princess, fell in love with Jason. She helped him through all his trials; slew for him her own sleepless serpent, who guarded the fleece; deceived her father, and secured both the fleece and the soul of Phrixus. At the last moment it appeared that her brother, Absyrtus, was about to lay an ambush for Jason. She invited Absyrtus to her room, stabbed him dead, and fled with Jason over the seas. She had given up all, and expected in return a perfect love.

And what of Jason? He could not possibly avoid taking Medea with him. He probably rather loved her. She formed at the least a brilliant addition to the glory of his enterprise. Not many heroes could

produce a barbarian princess ready to leave all and follow them in blind trust. For of course, as every one knew without the telling in fifth-century Athens, no legal marriage was possible between a Greek and a barbarian from Colchis.

All through the voyage home, a world-wide baffled voyage by the Ister and the Eridanus and the African Syrtes, Medea was still in her element, and proved a constant help and counsellor to the Argonauts. When they reached Jason's home, where Pelias was still king, things began to be different. An ordered and law-abiding Greek state was scarcely the place for the untamed Colchian. We only know the catastrophe. She saw with smothered rage how Pelias hated Jason and was bent on keeping the kingdom from him, and she determined to do her lover another act of splendid service. Making the most of her fame as an enchantress, she persuaded Pelias that he could, by a certain process, regain his youth. He eagerly caught at the hope. His daughters tried the process upon him, and Pelias died in agony. Surely Jason would be grateful now!

The real result was what it was sure to be in a civilised country. Medea and her lover had to fly for their lives, and Jason was debarred for ever from succeeding to the throne of Iôlcos. Probably there was another result also in Jason's mind: the conclusion that at all costs he must somehow separate himself from this wild beast of a woman who was ruining his life. He directed their flight to Corinth, governed at the time by a ruler of some sort, whether "tyrant" or king, who was growing old and had an only daughter. Creon would naturally want a son-in-law to support and suc

ceed him. And where in all Greece could he find one stronger or more famous than the chief of the Argonauts? If only Medea were not there! No doubt Jason owed her a great debt for her various services. Still, after all, he was not married to her. And a man must not be weak in such matters as these. Jason accepted the princess's hand, and when Medea became violent, found it difficult to be really angry with Creon for instantly condemning her to exile. At this point the tragedy begins.

The *Medea* is one of the earliest of Euripides' works now preserved to us. And those of us who have in our time glowed at all with the religion of realism, will probably feel in it many of the qualities of youth. Not, of course, the more normal, sensuous, romantic youth, the youth of *Romeo and Juliet;* but another kind—crude, austere, passionate—the youth of the poet who is also a sceptic and a devotee of truth, who so hates the conventionally and falsely beautiful that he is apt to be unduly ascetic towards beauty itself. When a writer really deficient in poetry walks in this path, the result is purely disagreeable. It produces its best results when the writer, like Euripides or Tolstoy, is so possessed by an inward flame of poetry that it breaks out at the great moments and consumes the cramping theory that would hold it in. One can feel in the *Medea* that the natural and inevitable romance of the story is kept rigidly down. One word about Medea's ancient serpent, two or three references to the Clashing Rocks, one startling flash of light upon the real love of Jason's life, love for the ship Argo, these are almost all the concessions made to us by the merciless

delineator of disaster into whose hands we are fallen. Jason is a middle-aged man, with much glory, indeed, and some illusions; but a man entirely set upon building up a great career, to whom love and all its works, though at times he has found them convenient, are for the most part only irrational and disturbing elements in a world which he can otherwise mould to his will. And yet, most cruel touch of all, one feels this man to be the real Jason. It is not that he has fallen from his heroic past. It is that he was really like this always. And so with Medea. It is not only that her beauty has begun to fade; not only that she is set in surroundings which vaguely belittle and weaken her, making her no more a bountiful princess, but only an ambiguous and much criticised foreigner. Her very devotion of love for Jason, now turned to hatred, shows itself to have been always of that somewhat rank and ugly sort to which such a change is natural.

For concentrated dramatic quality and sheer intensity of passion few plays ever written can vie with the *Medea*. Yet it obtained only a third prize at its first production; and, in spite of its immense fame, there are not many scholars who would put it among their favourite tragedies. The comparative failure of the first production was perhaps due chiefly to the extreme originality of the play. The Athenians in 432 B.C. had not yet learnt to understand or tolerate such work as this, though it is likely enough that they fortified their unfavourable opinion by the sort of criticisms which we still find attributed to Aristotle and Dicæarchus.

At the present time it is certainly not the newness of the subject: I do not think it is Aegeus, nor yet

the dragon chariot, much less Medea's involuntary burst of tears in the second scene with Jason, that really produces the feeling of dissatisfaction with which many people must rise from this great play. It is rather the general scheme on which the drama is built. It is a scheme which occurs again and again in Euripides, a study of oppression and revenge. Such a subject in the hands of a more ordinary writer would probably take the form of a triumph of oppressed virtue. But Euripides gives us nothing so sympathetic, nothing so cheap and unreal. If oppression usually made people virtuous, the problems of the world would be very different from what they are. Euripides seems at times to hate the revenge of the oppressed almost as much as the original cruelty of the oppressor; or, to put the same fact in a different light, he seems deliberately to dwell upon the twofold evil of cruelty, that it not only causes pain to the victim, but actually by means of the pain makes him a worse man, so that when his turn of triumph comes, it is no longer a triumph of justice or a thing to make men rejoice. This is a grim lesson; taught often enough by history, though seldom by the fables of the poets.

Seventeen years later than the *Medea* Euripides expressed this sentiment in a more positive way in the *Trojan Women*, where a depth of wrong borne without revenge becomes, or seems for the moment to become, a thing beautiful and glorious. But more plays are constructed like the *Medea*. The *Hecuba* begins with a noble and injured Queen, and ends with her hideous vengeance on her enemy and his innocent sons. In the *Orestes* all our hearts go out to the suf-

fering and deserted prince, till we find at last that we have committed ourselves to the blood-thirst of a madman. In the *Electra*, the workers of the vengeance themselves repent.

The dramatic effect of this kind of tragedy is curious. No one can call it undramatic or tame. Yet it is painfully unsatisfying. At the close of the *Medea* I actually find myself longing for a *deus ex machinâ*, for some being like Artemis in the *Hippolytus* or the good Dioscuri of the *Electra*, to speak a word of explanation or forgiveness, or at least leave some sound of music in our ears to drown that dreadful and insistent clamour of hate. The truth is that in this play Medea herself is the *dea ex machinâ*. The woman whom Jason and Creon intended simply to crush has been transformed by her injuries from an individual human being into a sort of living Curse. She is inspired with superhuman force. Her wrongs and her hate fill all the sky. And the judgment pronounced on Jason comes not from any disinterested or peacemaking God, but from his own victim transfigured into a devil.

From any such judgment there is an instant appeal to sane human sympathy. Jason has suffered more than enough. But that also is the way of the world. And the last word upon these tragic things is most often something not to be expressed by the sentences of even the wisest articulate judge, but only by the unspoken *lacrimæ rerum*.

G. M.

MEDEA

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

MEDEA, *daughter of Aiêtês, King of Colchis.*
JASON, *chief of the Argonauts; nephew of Pelias, King of Iôlcos in Thessaly.*
CREON, *ruler of Corinth.*
AEGEUS, *King of Athens.*
NURSE *of Medea.*
TWO CHILDREN *of Jason and Medea.*
ATTENDANT *on the children.*
A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Corinthian Women, with their LEADER.
Soldiers and Attendants

The scene is laid in Corinth. The play was first acted when Pythodôrus was Archon, Olympiad 87, year 1 (B.C. 431). *Euphorion was first, Sophocles second, Euripides third, with Medea, Philoctêtes, Dictys, and the Harvesters, a Satyr-play.*

MEDEA

The Scene represents the front of MEDEA'S *House in Corinth. A road to the right leads towards the royal castle, one on the left to the harbour. The* NURSE *is discovered alone.*

NURSE.

Would God no Argo e'er had winged the seas
To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades:
No shaft of riven pine in Pêlion's glen
Shaped that first oar-blade in the hands of men
Valiant, who won, to save King Pelias' vow,
The fleece All-golden! Never then, I trow,
Mine own princess, her spirit wounded sore
With love of Jason, to the encastled shore
Had sailed of old Iôlcos: never wrought
The daughters of King Pelias, knowing not,
To spill their father's life: nor fled in fear,
Hunted for that fierce sin, to Corinth here
With Jason and her babes. This folk at need
Stood friend to her, and she in word and deed
Served alway Jason. Surely this doth bind,
Through all ill days, the hurts of humankind,
When man and woman in one music move.
But now, the world is angry, and true love
Sick as with poison. Jason doth forsake
My mistress and his own two sons, to make

His couch in a king's chamber. He must wed:
Wed with this Creon's child, who now is head
And chief of Corinth. Wherefore sore betrayed
Medea calleth up the oath they made,
They two, and wakes the claspèd hands again,
The troth surpassing speech, and cries amain
On God in heaven to mark the end, and how
Jason hath paid his debt.
All fasting now
And cold, her body yielded up to pain,
Her days a waste of weeping, she hath lain,
Since first she knew that he was false. Her eyes
Are lifted not; and all her visage lies
In the dust. If friends will speak, she hears no more
Than some dead rock or wave that beats the shore:
Only the white throat in a sudden shame
May writhe, and all alone she moans the name
Of father, and land, and home, forsook that day
For this man's sake, who casteth her away.
Not to be quite shut out from home . . . alas,
She knoweth now how rare a thing that was!
Methinks she hath a dread, not joy, to see
Her children near. 'Tis this that maketh me
Most tremble, lest she do I know not what.
Her heart is no light thing, and useth not
To brook much wrong. I know that woman, aye,
And dread her! Will she creep alone to die
Bleeding in that old room, where still is laid
Lord Jason's bed? She hath for that a blade
Made keen. Or slay the bridegroom and the king,
And win herself God knows what direr thing?

'Tis a fell spirit. Few, I ween, shall stir
Her hate unscathed, or lightly humble her.
Ha! 'Tis the children from their games again,
Rested and gay; and all their mother's pain
Forgotten! Young lives ever turn from gloom!
[*The* CHILDREN *and their* ATTENDANT *come in.*

ATTENDANT.

Thou ancient treasure of my lady's room,
What mak'st thou here before the gates alone,
And alway turning on thy lips some moan
Of old mischances? Will our mistress be
Content, this long time to be left by thee?

NURSE.

Grey guard of Jason's children, a good thrall
Hath his own grief, if any hurt befall
His masters. Aye, it holds one's heart! . . .
Meseems
I have strayed out so deep in evil dreams,
I longed to rest me here alone, and cry
Medea's wrongs to this still Earth and Sky.

ATTENDANT.

How? Are the tears yet running in her eyes?

NURSE.

'Twere good to be like thee! . . . Her sorrow lies
Scarce wakened yet, not half its perils wrought.

ATTENDANT.

Mad spirit! . . . if a man may speak his thought
Of masters mad.—And nothing in her ears
Hath sounded yet of her last cause for tears!

[*He moves towards the house, but the* NURSE *checks him.*

NURSE.

What cause, old man? . . . Nay, grudge me not one word.

ATTENDANT.

'Tis nothing. Best forget what thou hast heard.

NURSE.

Nay, housemate, by thy beard! Hold it not hid
From me. . . . I will keep silence if thou bid.

ATTENDANT.

I heard an old man talking, where he sate
At draughts in the sun, beside the fountain gate,
And never thought of me, there standing still
Beside him. And he said, 'Twas Creon's will,
Being lord of all this land, that she be sent,
And with her her two sons, to banishment.
Maybe 'tis all false. For myself, I know
No further, and I would it were not so.

NURSE.

Jason will never bear it—his own sons
Banished,—however hot his anger runs
Against their mother!

ATTENDANT.

Old love burneth low
When new love wakes, men say. He is not now
Husband nor father here, nor any kin.

NURSE.

But this is ruin! New waves breaking in
To wreck us, ere we are righted from the old!

ATTENDANT.

Well, hold thy peace. Our mistress will be told
All in good time. Speak thou no word hereof.

NURSE.

My babes! What think ye of your father's love?
God curse him not, he is my master still:
But, oh, to them that loved him, 'tis an ill
Friend. . . .

ATTENDANT.

And what man on earth is different? How?
Hast thou lived all these years, and learned but now
That every man more loveth his own head
Than other men's? He dreameth of the bed
Of this new bride, and thinks not of his sons.

NURSE.

Go: run into the house, my little ones:
All will end happily! . . . Keep them apart:
Let not their mother meet them while her heart

Is darkened. Yester night I saw a flame
Stand in her eye, as though she hated them,
And would I know not what. For sure her wrath
Will never turn nor slumber, till she hath . . .
Go: and if some must suffer, may it be
Not we who love her, but some enemy!

VOICE (*within*).

Oh shame and pain: O woe is me!
Would I could die in my misery!

[*The* CHILDREN *and the* ATTENDANT *go in.*

NURSE.

Ah, children, hark! She moves again
Her frozen heart, her sleeping wrath.
In, quick! And never cross her path,
Nor rouse that dark eye in its pain;

That fell sea-spirit, and the dire
Spring of a will untaught, unbowed.
Quick, now!—Methinks this weeping cloud
Hath in its heart some thunder-fire,

Slow gathering, that must flash ere long.
I know not how, for ill or well,
It turns, this uncontrollable
Tempestuous spirit, blind with wrong.

VOICE (*within*).

Have I not suffered? Doth it call
No tears? . . . Ha, ye beside the wall
Unfathered children, God hate you
As I am hated, and him, too,
That gat you, and this house and all!

NURSE.

For pity! What have they to do,
Babes, with their father's sin? Why call
Thy curse on these? . . . Ah, children, all
These days my bosom bleeds for you.

Rude are the wills of princes: yea,
Prevailing alway, seldom crossed,
On fitful winds their moods are tossed:
'Tis best men tread the equal way.

Aye, not with glory but with peace
May the long summers find me crowned:
For gentleness—her very sound
Is magic, and her usages

All wholesome: but the fiercely great
Hath little music on his road,
And falleth, when the hand of God
Shall move, most deep and desolate.

[*During the last words the* LEADER *of the Chorus has entered. Other women follow her.*

LEADER.

I heard a voice and a moan,
A voice of the eastern seas:
Hath she found not yet her ease?
Speak, O agèd one.
For I stood afar at the gate,
And there came from within a cry,

And wailing desolate.
Ah, no more joy have I,
For the griefs this house doth see,
And the love it hath wrought in me.

NURSE.

There is no house! 'Tis gone. The lord
Seeketh a prouder bed: and she
Wastes in her chamber, not one word
Will hear of care or charity.

VOICE (*within*).

O Zeus, O Earth, O Light,
Will the fire not stab my brain?
What profiteth living? Oh,
Shall I not lift the slow
Yoke, and let Life go,
As a beast out in the night,
To lie, and be rid of pain?

CHORUS.

Some Women

A.

"O Zeus, O Earth, O Light:"
The cry of a bride forlorn
Heard ye, and wailing born
Of lost delight?

B.

Why weariest thou this day,
Wild heart, for the bed abhorrèd,
The cold bed in the clay?
Death cometh though no man pray,
Ungarlanded, un-adorèd.
Call him not thou.

C.

If another's arms be now
Where thine have been,
On his head be the sin:
Rend not thy brow!

D.

All that thou sufferest,
God seeth: Oh, not so sore
Waste nor weep for the breast
That was thine of yore.

Voice (*within*).

Virgin of Righteousness,
Virgin of hallowed Troth,
Ye marked me when with an oath
I bound him; mark no less
That oath's end. Give me to see
Him and his bride, who sought
My grief when I wronged her not,
Broken in misery,

And all her house. . . . O God,
My mother's home, and the dim
Shore that I left for him,
And the voice of my brother's blood. . . .

NURSE.

Oh, wild words! Did ye hear her cry
To them that guard man's faith forsworn,
Themis and Zeus? . . . This wrath new-born
Shall make mad workings ere it die.

CHORUS.

Other Women.

A.

Would she but come to seek
Our faces, that love her well,
And take to her heart the spell
Of words that speak?

B.

Alas for the heavy hate
And anger that burneth ever!
Would it but now abate,
Ah God, I love her yet.
And surely my love's endeavour
Shall fail not here.

C.

Go: from that chamber drear
Forth to the day
Lead her, and say, Oh, say
That we love her dear.

D.

Go, lest her hand be hard.
On the innocent: Ah, let be!
For her grief moves hitherward,
Like an angry sea.

NURSE.

That will I: though what words of mine
Or love shall move her? Let them lie
With the old lost labours! . . . Yet her eye—
Know ye the eyes of the wild kine,

The lion flash that guards their brood?
So looks she now if any thrall
Speak comfort, or draw near at all
My mistress in her evil mood.

[*The* NURSE *goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

A Woman.

Alas, the bold blithe bards of old
That all for joy their music made,
For feasts and dancing manifold,
That Life might listen and be glad.

But all the darkness and the wrong,
Quick deaths and dim heart-aching things,
Would no man ease them with a song
Or music of a thousand strings?

Then song had served us in our need.
What profit, o'er the banquet's swell
That lingering cry that none may heed?
The feast hath filled them: all is well!

Others.

I heard a song, but it comes no more,
Where the tears ran over:
A keen cry but tired, tired:
A woman's cry for her heart's desired,
For a traitor's kiss and a lost lover.
But a prayer, methinks, yet riseth sore
To God, to Faith, God's ancient daughter—
The Faith that over sundering seas
Drew her to Hellas, and the breeze
Of midnight shivered, and the door
Closed of the salt unsounded water.

[*During the last words* MEDEA *has come out from the house.*

MEDEA.

Women of Corinth, I am come to show
My face, lest ye despise me. For I know
Some heads stand high and fail not, even at night
Alone—far less like this, in all men's sight:
And we, who study not our wayfarings
But feel and cry—Oh we are drifting things,
And evil! For what truth is in men's eyes,
Which search no heart, but in a flash despise

A strange face, shuddering back from one that ne'er
Hath wronged them? . . . Sure, far-comers anywhere,
I know, must bow them and be gentle. Nay,
A Greek himself men praise not, who alway
Should seek his own will recking not. . . . But I—
This thing undreamed of, sudden from on high,
Hath sapped my soul: I dazzle where I stand,
The cup of all life shattered in my hand,
Longing to die—O friends! He, even he,
Whom to know well was all the world to me,
The man I loved, hath proved most evil.—Oh,
Of all things upon earth that bleed and grow,
A herb most bruised is woman. We must pay
Our store of gold, hoarded for that one day,
To buy us some man's love; and lo, they bring
A master of our flesh! There comes the sting
Of the whole shame. And then the jeopardy,
For good or ill, what shall that master be;
Reject she cannot: and if he but stays
His suit, 'tis shame on all that woman's days.
So thrown amid new laws, new places, why,
'Tis magic she must have, or prophecy—
Home never taught her that—how best to guide
Toward peace this thing that sleepeth at her side.
And she who, labouring long, shall find some way
Whereby her lord may bear with her, nor fray
His yoke too fiercely, blessed is the breath
That woman draws! Else, let her pray for death.
Her lord, if he be wearied of the face
Withindoors, gets him forth; some merrier place
Will ease his heart: but she waits on, her whole
Vision enchainèd on a single soul.

And then, forsooth, 'tis they that face the call
Of war, while we sit sheltered, hid from all
Peril!—False mocking! Sooner would I stand
Three times to face their battles, shield in hand,
Than bear one child.
But peace! There cannot be
Ever the same tale told of thee and me.
Thou hast this city, and thy father's home,
And joy of friends, and hope in days to come:
But I, being citiless, am cast aside
By him that wedded me, a savage bride
Won in far seas and left—no mother near,
No brother, not one kinsman anywhere
For harbour in this storm. Therefore of thee
I ask one thing. If chance yet ope to me
Some path, if even now my hand can win
Strength to requite this Jason for his sin,
Betray me not! Oh, in all things but this,
I know how full of fears a woman is,
And faint at need, and shrinking from the light
Of battle: but once spoil her of her right
In man's love, and there moves, I warn thee well,
No bloodier spirit between heaven and hell.

LEADER.

I will betray thee not. It is but just,
Thou smite him.—And that weeping in the dust
And stormy tears, how should I blame them? . . .
Stay:
'Tis Creon, lord of Corinth, makes his way
Hither, and bears, methinks, some word of weight.

Enter from the right CREON, *the King, with armed Attendants.*

CREON.

Thou woman sullen-eyed and hot with hate
Against thy lord, Medea, I here command
That thou and thy two children from this land
Go forth to banishment. Make no delay:
Seeing ourselves, the King, are come this day
To see our charge fulfilled; nor shall again
Look homeward ere we have led thy children twain
And thee beyond our realm's last boundary.

MEDEA.

Lost! Lost!
Mine haters at the helm with sail flung free
Pursuing; and for us no beach nor shore
In the endless waters! . . . Yet, though stricken sore,
I still will ask thee, for what crime, what thing
Unlawful, wilt thou cast me out, O King?

CREON

What crime? I fear thee, woman—little need
To cloak my reasons—lest thou work some deed
Of darkness on my child. And in that fear
Reasons enough have part. Thou comest here
A wise-woman confessed, and full of lore
In unknown ways of evil. Thou art sore
In heart, being parted from thy lover's arms.
And more, thou hast made menace . . . so the alarms

But now have reached mine ear . . . on bride and groom,
And him who gave the bride, to work thy doom
Of vengeance. Which, ere yet it be too late,
I sweep aside. I choose to earn thine hate
Of set will now, not palter with the mood
Of mercy, and hereafter weep in blood.

MEDEA.

'Tis not the first nor second time, O King,
That fame hath hurt me, and come nigh to bring
My ruin. . . . How can any man, whose eyes
Are wholesome, seek to rear his children wise
Beyond men's wont? Much helplessness in arts
Of common life, and in their townsmen's hearts
Envy deep-set . . . so much their learning brings!
Come unto fools with knowledge of new things,
They deem it vanity, not knowledge. Aye,
And men that erst for wisdom were held high,
Feel thee a thorn to fret them, privily
Held higher than they. So hath it been with me.
A wise-woman I am; and for that sin
To divers ill names men would pen me in;
A seed of strife; an eastern dreamer; one
Of brand not theirs; one hard to play upon . . .
Ah, I am not so wondrous wise!—And now,
To thee, I am terrible! What fearest thou?
What dire deed? Do I tread so proud a path—
Fear me not thou!—that I should brave the wrath
Of princes? Thou: what has thou ever done
To wrong me? Granted thine own child to one
Whom thy soul chose.—Ah, *him* out of my heart
I hate; but thou, meseems, hast done thy part

Not ill. And for thine houses' happiness
I hold no grudge. Go: marry, and God bless
Your issues. Only suffer me to rest
Somewhere within this land. Though sore oppressed,
I will be still, knowing mine own defeat.

CREON.

Thy words be gentle: but I fear me yet
Lest even now there creep some wickedness
Deep hid within thee. And for that the less
I trust thee now than ere these words began.
A woman quick of wrath, aye, or a man,
Is easier watching than the cold and still.
Up, straight, and find thy road! Mock not my will
With words. This doom is passed beyond recall;
Nor all thy crafts shall help thee, being withal
My manifest foe, to linger at my side.

MEDEA (*suddenly throwing herself down and clinging to* CREON).

Oh, by thy knees! By that new-wedded bride . . .

CREON.

'Tis waste of words. Thou shalt not weaken me.

MEDEA.

Wilt hunt me? Spurn me when I kneel to thee?

CREON.

'Tis mine own house that kneels to me, not thou.

MEDEA.

Home, my lost home, how I desire thee now!

CREON.

And I mine, and my child, beyond all things.

MEDEA.

O Loves of man, what curse is on your wings!

CREON.

Blessing or curse, 'tis as their chances flow.

MEDEA.

Remember, Zeus, the cause of all this woe!

CREON.

Oh, rid me of my pains! Up, get thee gone!

MEDEA.

What would I with thy pains? I have mine own.

CREON.

Up: or, 'fore God, my soldiers here shall fling . . .

MEDEA.

Not that! Not that! . . . I do but pray, O King . . .

CREON.

Thou wilt not? I must face the harsher task?

MEDEA

I accept mine exile. 'Tis not that I ask.

CREON.

Why then so wild? Why clinging to mine hand?

MEDEA (*rising*).

For one day only leave me in thy land
At peace, to find some counsel, ere the strain
Of exile fall, some comfort for these twain,
Mine innocents; since others take no thought,
It seems, to save the babes that they begot.
Ah! Thou wilt pity them! Thou also art
A father: thou hast somewhere still a heart
That feels. . . . I reck not of myself: 'tis they
That break me, fallen upon so dire a day.

CREON.

Mine is no tyrant's mood. Aye, many a time
Ere this my tenderness hath marred the chime
Of wisest counsels. And I know that now
I do mere folly. But so be it! Thou
Shalt have this grace . . . But this I warn thee clear,
If once the morrow's sunlight find thee here
Within my borders, thee or child of thine,
Thou diest! . . . Of this judgment not a line

Shall waver nor abate. So linger on,
If thou needs must, till the next risen sun;
No further. . . . In one day there scarce can be
Those perils wrought whose dread yet haunteth me.
[*Exit* CREON *with his suite.*

CHORUS.

O woman, woman of sorrow,
Where wilt thou turn and flee?
What town shall be thine to-morrow,
What land of all lands that be,
What door of a strange man's home?
Yea, God hath hunted thee,
Medea, forth to the foam
Of a trackless sea.

MEDEA.

Defeat on every side; what else?—But Oh,
Not here the end is: think it not! I know
For bride and groom one battle yet untried,
And goodly pains for him that gave the bride.
Dost dream I would have grovelled to this man,
Save that I won mine end, and shaped my plan
For merry deeds? My lips had never deigned
Speak word with him: my flesh been never stained
With touching. . . . Fool, Oh, triple fool! It lay
So plain for him to kill my whole essay
By exile swift: and, lo, he sets me free
This one long day: wherein mine haters three
Shall lie here dead, the father and the bride
And husband—mine, not hers! Oh, I have tried

So many thoughts of murder to my turn,
I know not which best likes me. Shall I burn
Their house with fire? Or stealing past unseen
To Jason's bed—I have a blade made keen
For that—stab, breast to breast, that wedded pair?
Good, but for one thing. When I am taken there,
And killed, they will laugh loud who hate me. . . .
Nay,
I love the old way best, the simple way
Of poison, where we too are strong as men.
Ah me!
And they being dead—what place shall hold me then?
What friend shall rise, with land inviolate
And trusty doors, to shelter from their hate
This flesh? . . . None anywhere! . . . A little more
I needs must wait: and, if there ope some door
Of refuge, some strong tower to shield me, good:
In craft and darkness I will hunt this blood.
Else, if mine hour be come and no hope nigh,
Then sword in hand, full-willed and sure to die,
I yet will live to slay them. I will wend
Man-like, their road of daring to the end.
So help me She who of all Gods hath been
The best to me, of all my chosen queen
And helpmate, Hecatê, who dwells apart,
The flame of flame, in my fire's inmost heart:
For all their strength, they shall not stab my soul
And laugh thereafter! Dark and full of dole
Their bridal feast shall be, most dark the day
They joined their hands, and hunted me away.
Awake thee now, Medea! Whatso plot
Thou hast, or cunning, strive and falter not.

On to the peril-point! Now comes the strain
Of daring. Shall they trample thee again?
How? And with Hellas laughing o'er thy fall
While this thief's daughter weds, and weds withal
Jason? . . . A true king was thy father, yea,
And born of the ancient Sun! . . . Thou know'st
the way;
And God hath made thee woman, things most vain
For help, but wondrous in the paths of pain.

[MEDEA *goes into the House.*

CHORUS.

Back streams the wave on the ever-running river:
Life, life is changed and the laws of it o'ertrod.
Man shall be the slave, the affrighted, the low-liver!
Man hath forgotten God.
And woman, yea, woman, shall be terrible in story:
The tales too, meseemeth, shall be other than of
yore.
For a fear there is that cometh out of Woman and a
glory,
And the hard hating voices shall encompass her no
more!

The old bards shall cease, and their memory that
lingers
Of frail brides and faithless, shall be shrivelled as
with fire.
For they loved us not, nor knew us: and our lips were
dumb, our fingers
Could wake not the secret of the lyre.

Else, else, O God the Singer, I had sung amid their rages
A long tale of Man and his deeds for good and ill.
But the old World knoweth—'tis the speech of all his ages—
Man's wrong and ours: he knoweth and is still.

Some Women.

Forth from thy father's home
Thou camest, O heart of fire,
To the Dark Blue Rocks, to the clashing foam,
To the seas of thy desire:

Till the Dark Blue Bar was crossed;
And, lo, by an alien river
Standing, thy lover lost,
Void-armed for ever,

Forth yet again, O lowest
Of landless women, a ranger
Of desolate ways, thou goest,
From the walls of the stranger.

Others.

And the great Oath waxeth weak;
And Ruth, as a thing outstriven,
Is fled, fled, from the shores of the Greek,
Away on the winds of heaven,

Dark is the house afar,
Where an old king called thee daughter;
All that was once thy star
In stormy water,

Dark: and, lo, in the nearer
House that was sworn to love thee,
Another, queenlier, dearer,
Is thronèd above thee.

Enter from the right JASON.

JASON.

Oft have I seen, in other days than these,
How a dark temper maketh maladies
No friend can heal. 'Twas easy to have kept
Both land and home. It needed but to accept
Unstrivingly the pleasure of our lords.
But thou, for mere delight in stormy words,
Wilt lose all! . . . Now thy speech provokes not me.
Rail on. Of all mankind let Jason be
Most evil; none shall check thee. But for these
Dark threats cast out against the majesties
Of Corinth, count as veriest gain thy path
Of exile. I myself, when princely wrath
Was hot against thee, strove with all good will
To appease the wrath, and wished to keep thee still
Beside me. But thy mouth would never stay
From vanity, blaspheming night and day
Our masters. Therefore thou shalt fly the land.
Yet, even so, I will not hold my hand
From succouring mine own people. Here am I
To help thee, woman, pondering heedfully

Thy new state. For I would not have thee flung
Provisionless away—aye, and the young
Children as well; nor lacking aught that will
Of mine can bring thee. Many a lesser ill
Hangs on the heels of exile. . . . Aye, and though
Thou hate me, dream not that my heart can know
Or fashion aught of angry will to thee.

MEDEA

Evil, most evil! . . . since thou grantest me
That comfort, the worst weapon left me now
To smite a coward. . . . Thou comest to me, thou,
Mine enemy! (*Turning to the* CHORUS.) Oh, say,
how call ye this,
To face, and smile, the comrade whom his kiss
Betrayed? Scorn? Insult? Courage? None of
these:
'Tis but of all man's inward sicknesses
The vilest, that he knoweth not of shame
Nor pity! Yet I praise him that he came . . .
To me it shall bring comfort, once to clear
My heart on thee, and thou shalt wince to hear.
I will begin with that, 'twixt me and thee,
That first befell. I saved thee. I saved thee—
Let thine own Greeks be witness, every one
That sailed on Argo—saved thee, sent alone
To yoke with yokes the bulls of fiery breath,
And sow that Acre of the Lords of Death;
And mine own ancient Serpent, who did keep
The Golden Fleece, the eyes that knew not sleep,
And shining coils, him also did I smite
Dead for thy sake, and lifted up the light

That bade thee live. Myself, uncounsellèd,
Stole forth from father and from home, and fled
Where dark Iôlcos under Pelion lies,
With thee—Oh, single-hearted more than wise!
I murdered Pelias, yea, in agony,
By his own daughters' hands, for sake of thee;
I swept their house like War.—And hast thou then
Accepted all—O evil yet again!—
And cast me off and taken thee for bride
Another? And with children at thy side!
One could forgive a childless man. But no:
I have borne thee children . . .
Is sworn faith so low
And weak a thing? I understand it not.
Are the old gods dead? Are the old laws forgot,
And new laws made? Since not my passioning,
But thine own heart, doth cry thee for a thing
Forsworn.

[*She catches sight of her own hand which she has thrown out to denounce him.*

Poor, poor right hand of mine, whom he
Did cling to, and these knees, so cravingly,
We are unclean, thou and I; we have caught the stain
Of bad men's flesh . . . and dreamed our dreams in vain.
Thou comest to befriend me? Give me, then,
Thy counsel. 'Tis not that I dream again
For good from thee: but, questioned, thou wilt show
The viler. Say: now whither shall I go?
Back to my father? Him I did betray,
And all his land, when we two fled away.
To those poor Peliad maids? For them 'twere good
To take me in, who spilled their father's blood, . . .

Aye, so my whole life stands! There were at home
Who loved me well: to them I am become
A curse. And the first friends who sheltered me,
Whom most I should have spared, to pleasure thee
I have turned to foes. Oh, therefore hast thou laid
My crown upon me, blest of many a maid
In Hellas, now I have won what all did crave,
Thee, the world-wondered lover and the brave;
Who this day looks and sees me banished, thrown
Away with these two babes, all, all, alone . . .
Oh, merry mocking when the lamps are red:
"Where go the bridegroom's babes to beg their bread
In exile, and the woman who gave all
To save him?"
O great God, shall gold withal
Bear thy clear mark, to sift the base and fine,
And o'er man's living visage runs no sign
To show the lie within, ere all too late?

LEADER.

Dire and beyond all healing is the hate
When hearts that loved are turned to enmity.

JASON.

In speech at least, meseemeth, I must be
Not evil; but, as some old pilot goes
Furled to his sail's last edge, when danger blows
Too fiery, run before the wind and swell,
Woman, of thy loud storms.—And thus I tell
My tale. Since thou wilt build so wondrous high
Thy deeds of service in my jeopardy,

To all my crew and quest I know but one
Saviour, of Gods or mortals one alone,
The Cyprian. Oh, thou hast both brain and wit,
Yet underneath . . . nay, all the tale of it
Were graceless telling; how sheer love, a fire
Of poison-shafts, compelled thee with desire
To save me. But enough. I will not score
That count too close. 'Twas good help: and therefor
I give thee thanks, howe'er the help was wrought.
Howbeit, in my deliverance, thou hast got
Far more than given. A good Greek land hath been
Thy lasting home, not barbary. Thou hast seen
Our ordered life, and justice, and the long
Still grasp of law not changing with the strong
Man's pleasure. Then, all Hellas far and near
Hath learned thy wisdom, and in every ear
Thy fame is. Had thy days run by unseen
On that last edge of the world, where then had been
The story of great Medea? Thou and I . . .
What worth to us were treasures heapèd high
In rich kings' rooms; what worth a voice of gold
More sweet than ever rang from Orpheus old,
Unless our deeds have glory?
Speak I so,
Touching the Quest I wrought, thyself did throw
The challenge down. Next for thy cavilling
Of wrath at mine alliance with a king,
Here thou shalt see I both was wise, and free
From touch of passion, and a friend to thee
Most potent, and my children . . . Nay, be still!
When first I stood in Corinth, clogged with ill

From many a desperate mischance, what bliss
Could I that day have dreamed of, like to this,
To wed with a king's daughter, I exiled
And beggared? Not—what makes thy passion wild—
From loathing of thy bed; not over-fraught
With love for this new bride; not that I sought
To upbuild mine house with offspring: 'tis enough,
What thou hast borne: I make no word thereof:
But, first and greatest, that we all might dwell
In a fair house and want not, knowing well
That poor men have no friends, but far and near
Shunning and silence. Next, I sought to rear
Our sons in nurture worthy of my race,
And, raising brethren to them, in one place
Join both my houses, and be all from now
Prince-like and happy. What more need hast thou
Of children? And for me, it serves my star
To link in strength the children that now are
With those that shall be.
Have I counselled ill?
Not thine own self would say it, couldst thou still
One hour thy jealous flesh.—'Tis ever so!
Who looks for more in women? When the flow
Of love runs plain, why, all the world is fair:
But, once there fall some ill chance anywhere
To baulk that thirst, down in swift hate are trod
Men's dearest aims and noblest. Would to God
We mortals by some other seed could raise
Our fruits, and no blind women block our ways!
Then had there been no curse to wreck mankind.

LEADER.

Lord Jason, very subtly hast thou twined
Thy speech: but yet, though all athwart thy will
I speak, this is not well thou dost, but ill,
Betraying her who loved thee and was true.

MEDEA.

Surely I have my thoughts, and not a few
Have held me strange. To me it seemeth, when
A crafty tongue is given to evil men
'Tis like to wreck, not help them. Their own brain
Tempts them with lies to dare and dare again,
Till . . . no man hath enough of subtlety.
As thou—be not so seeming-fair to me
Nor deft of speech. One word will make thee fall.
Wert thou not false, 'twas thine to tell me all,
And charge me help thy marriage path, as I
Did love thee; not befool me with a lie.

JASON.

An easy task had that been! Aye, and thou
A loving aid, who canst not, even now,
Still that loud heart that surges like the tide!

MEDEA.

That moved thee not. Thine old barbarian bride,
The dog out of the east who loved thee sore,
She grew grey-haired, she served thy pride no more.

JASON.

Now understand for once! The girl to me
Is nothing, in this web of sovranty
I hold. I do but seek to save, even yet,
Thee: and for brethren to our sons beget
Young kings, to prosper all our lives again.

MEDEA.

God shelter me from prosperous days of pain,
And wealth that maketh wounds about my heart.

JASON.

Wilt change that prayer, and choose a wiser part?
Pray not to hold true sense for pain, nor rate
Thyself unhappy, being too fortunate.

MEDEA.

Aye, mock me; thou hast where to lay thine head,
But I go naked to mine exile.

JASON.

Tread
Thine own path! Thou hast made it all to be.

MEDEA.

How? By seducing and forsaking thee?

JASON.

By those vile curses on the royal halls
Let loose. . . .

MEDEA.

On thy house also, as chance falls,
I am a living curse.

JASON.

Oh, peace! Enough
Of these vain wars: I will no more thereof.
If thou wilt take from all that I possess
Aid for these babes and thine own helplessness
Of exile, speak thy bidding. Here I stand
Full-willed to succour thee with stintless hand,
And send my signet to old friends that dwell
On foreign shores, who will entreat thee well.
Refuse, and thou shalt do a deed most vain.
But cast thy rage away, and thou shalt gain
Much, and lose little for thine anger's sake.

MEDEA.

I will not seek thy friends. I will not take
Thy givings. Give them not. Fruits of a stem
Unholy bring no blessing after them.

JASON.

Now God in heaven be witness, all my heart
Is willing, in all ways, to do its part

For thee and for thy babes. But nothing good
Can please thee. In sheer savageness of mood
Thou drivest from thee every friend. Wherefore
I warrant thee, thy pains shall be the more.

[*He goes slowly away.*

MEDEA.

Go: thou art weary for the new delight
Thou wooest, so long tarrying out of sight
Of her sweet chamber. Go, fulfil thy pride,
O bridegroom! For it may be, such a bride
Shall wait thee,—yea, God heareth me in this—
As thine own heart shall sicken ere it kiss.

CHORUS.

Alas, the Love that falleth like a flood,
Strong-winged and transitory:
Why praise ye him? What beareth he of good
To man, or glory?
Yet Love there is that moves in gentleness,
Heart-filling, sweetest of all powers that bless.
Loose not on me, O Holder of man's heart,
Thy golden quiver,
Nor steep in poison of desire the dart
That heals not ever.

The pent hate of the word that cavilleth,
The strife that hath no fill,
Where once was fondness; and the mad heart's breath
For strange love panting still:
O Cyprian, cast me not on these; but sift,
Keen-eyed, of love the good and evil gift.

Make Innocence my friend, God's fairest star,
Yea, and abate not
The rare sweet beat of bosoms without war,
That love, and hate not.

Others.

Home of my heart, land of my own,
Cast me not, nay, for pity,
Out on my ways, helpless, alone,
Where the feet fail in the mire and stone,
A woman without a city.
Ah, not that! Better the end:
The green grave cover me rather,
If a break must come in the days I know,
And the skies be changed and the earth below;
For the weariest road that man may wend
Is forth from the home of his father.

Lo, we have seen: 'tis not a song
Sung, nor learned of another.
For whom hast thou in thy direst wrong
For comfort? Never a city strong
To hide thee, never a brother.
Ah, but the man—cursèd be he,
Cursèd beyond recover,
Who openeth, shattering, seal by seal,
A friend's clean heart, then turns his heel,
Deaf unto love: never in me
Friend shall he know nor lover.

[*While* MEDEA *is waiting downcast, seated upon her door-step, there passes from the left a traveller with followers. As he catches sight of* MEDEA *he stops.*

AEGEUS.

Have joy, Medea! 'Tis the homeliest
Word that old friends can greet with, and the best.

MEDEA (*looking up, surprised*).

Oh, joy on thee, too, Aegeus, gentle king
Of Athens!—But whence com'st thou journeying?

AEGEUS.

From Delphi now and the old encaverned stair. . . .

MEDEA.

Where Earth's heart speaks in song? What mad'st thou there?

AEGEUS.

Prayed heaven for children—the same search alway.

MEDEA.

Children? Ah God! Art childless to this day?

AEGEUS.

So God hath willed. Childless and desolate.

MEDEA.

What word did Phœbus speak, to change thy fate?

AEGEUS.

Riddles, too hard for mortal man to read.

MEDEA.

Which I may hear?

AEGEUS.

Assuredly: they need
A rarer wit.

MEDEA.

How said he?

AEGEUS.

Not to spill
Life's wine, nor seek for more. . . .

MEDEA.

Until?

AEGEUS.

Until
I tread the hearth-stone of my sires of yore.

MEDEA.

And what should bring thee here, by Creon's shore?

AEGEUS.

One Pittheus know'st thou, high lord of Trozên?

MEDEA.

Aye, Pelops' son, a man most pure of sin.

AEGEUS.

Him I would ask, touching Apollo's will.

MEDEA.

Much use in God's ways hath he, and much skill.

AEGEUS.

And, long years back he was my battle-friend,
The truest e'er man had.

MEDEA.

Well, may God send
Good hap to thee, and grant all thy desire.

AEGEUS.

But thou . . . ? Thy frame is wasted, and the fire
Dead in thine eyes.

MEDEA.

Aegeus, my husband is
The falsest man in the world.

AEGEUS.

What word is this?
Say clearly what thus makes thy visage dim?

MEDEA.

He is false to me, who never injured him.

AEGEUS.

What hath he done? Show all, that I may see.

MEDEA.

Ta'en him a wife; a wife, set over me
To rule his house.

AEGEUS.

He hath not dared to do,
Jason, a thing so shameful?

MEDEA.

Aye, 'tis true:
And those he loved of yore have no place now.

AEGEUS.

Some passion sweepeth him? Or is it thou
He turns from?

MEDEA.

Passion, passion to betray
His dearest!

AEGEUS.

Shame be his, so fallen away
From honour!

MEDEA.

Passion to be near a throne,
A king's heir!

AEGEUS.

How, who gives the bride? Say on.

MEDEA.

Creon, who o'er all Corinth standeth chief.

AEGEUS.

Woman, thou hast indeed much cause for grief.

MEDEA.

'Tis ruin.—And they have cast me out as well.

AEGEUS.

Who? 'Tis a new wrong this, and terrible.

MEDEA.

Creon the king, from every land and shore. . . .

AEGEUS.

And Jason suffers him? Oh, 'tis too sore!

MEDEA.

He loveth to bear bravely ills like these!
But, Aegeus, by thy beard, oh, by thy knees,
I pray thee, and I give me for thine own,
Thy suppliant, pity me! Oh, pity one
So miserable. Thou never wilt stand there
And see me cast out friendless to despair.
Give me a home in Athens . . . by the fire
Of thine own hearth! Oh, so may thy desire
Of children be fulfilled of God, and thou
Die happy! . . . Thou canst know not; even now
Thy prize is won! I, I will make of thee
A childless man no more. The seed shall be,
I swear it, sown. Such magic herbs I know.

AEGEUS.

Woman, indeed my heart goes forth to show
This help to thee, first for religion's sake,
Then for thy promised hope, to heal my ache
Of childlessness. 'Tis this hath made mine whole
Life as a shadow, and starved out my soul.
But thus it stands with me. Once make thy way
To Attic earth, I, as in law I may,
Will keep thee and befriend. But in this land,
Where Creon rules, I may not raise my hand
To shelter thee. Move of thine own essay
To seek my house, there thou shalt alway stay,
Inviolate, never to be seized again.
But come thyself from Corinth. I would fain
Even in foreign eyes be alway just.

MEDEA.

'Tis well. Give me an oath wherein to trust
And all that man could ask thou hast granted me.

AEGEUS.

Dost trust me not? Or what thing troubleth thee?

MEDEA.

I trust thee. But so many, far and near,
Do hate me—all King Pelias' house, and here
Creon. Once bound by oaths and sanctities
Thou canst not yield me up for such as these
To drag from Athens. But a spoken word,
No more, to bind thee, which no God hath heard. . .
The embassies, methinks, would come and go:
They all are friends to thee. . . . Ah me, I know
Thou wilt not list to me! So weak am I,
And they full-filled with gold and majesty.

AEGEUS.

Methinks 'tis a far foresight, this thine oath.
Still, if thou so wilt have it, nothing loath
Am I to serve thee. Mine own hand is so
The stronger, if I have this plea to show
Thy persecutors: and for thee withal
The bond more sure.—On what God shall I call?

MEDEA.

Swear by the Earth thou treadest, by the Sun,
Sire of my sires, and all the gods as one. . . .

AEGEUS.

To do what thing or not do? Make all plain.

MEDEA.

Never thyself to cast me out again.
Nor let another, whatsoe'er his plea,
Take me, while thou yet livest and art free.

AEGEUS.

Never: so hear me, Earth, and the great star
Of daylight, and all other gods that are!

MEDEA.

'Tis well: and if thou falter from thy vow . . . ?

AEGEUS.

God's judgment on the godless break my brow!

MEDEA.

Go! Go thy ways rejoicing.—All is bright
And clear before me. Go: and ere the night
Myself will follow, when the deed is done
I purpose, and the end I thirst for won.

[AEGEUS *and his train depart.*

CHORUS.

Farewell: and Maia's guiding Son
Back lead thee to thy hearth and fire,
Aegeus; and all the long desire
That wasteth thee, at last be won:
Our eyes have seen thee as thou art,
A gentle and a righteous heart.

MEDEA.

God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies!
At last the victory dawneth! Yea, mine eyes
See, and my foot is on the mountain's brow.
Mine enemies! Mine enemies, oh, now
Atonement cometh! Here at my worst hour
A friend is found, a very port of power
To save my shipwreck. Here will I make fast
Mine anchor, and escape them at the last
In Athens' wallèd hill.—But ere the end
'Tis meet I show thee all my counsel, friend:
Take it, no tale to make men laugh withal!
Straightway to Jason I will send some thrall
To entreat him to my presence. Comes he here,
Then with soft reasons will I feed his ear,
How his will now is my will, how all things
Are well, touching this marriage-bed of kings
For which I am betrayed—all wise and rare
And profitable! Yet will I make one prayer,
That my two children be no more exiled
But stay. . . . Oh, not that I would leave a child

Here upon angry shores till those have laughed
Who hate me: 'tis that I will slay by craft
The king's daughter. With gifts they shall be sent,
Gifts to the bride to spare their banishment,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold.
Which raiment let her once but take, and fold
About her, a foul death that girl shall die
And all who touch her in her agony.
Such poison shall they drink, my robe and wreath!
Howbeit, of that no more. I gnash my teeth
Thinking on what a path my feet must tread
Thereafter. I shall lay those children dead—
Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away!
Then, leaving Jason childless, and the day
As night above him, I will go my road
To exile, flying, flying from the blood
Of these my best-beloved, and having wrought
All horror, so but one thing reach me not,
The laugh of them that hate us.
Let it come!
What profits life to me? I have no home,
No country now, nor shield from any wrong.
That was my evil hour, when down the long
Halls of my father out I stole, my will
Chained by a Greek man's voice, who still, oh, still,
If God yet live, shall all requited be.
For never child of mine shall Jason see
Hereafter living, never child beget
From his new bride, who this day, desolate
Even as she made me desolate, shall die
Shrieking amid my poisons. . . . Names have I
Among your folk? One light? One weak of hand?
An eastern dreamer?—Nay, but with the brand

Of strange suns burnt, my hate, by God above,
A perilous thing, and passing sweet my love!
For these it is that make life glorious.

LEADER.

Since thou has bared thy fell intent to us
I, loving thee, and helping in their need
Man's laws, adjure thee, dream not of this deed!

MEDEA.

There is no other way.—I pardon thee
Thy littleness, who art not wronged like me.

LEADER.

Thou canst not kill the fruit thy body bore!

MEDEA.

Yes: if the man I hate be pained the more.

LEADER.

And thou made miserable, most miserable?

MEDEA

Oh, let it come! All words of good or ill
Are wasted now.

[*She claps her hands: the* NURSE *comes out from the house.*

Ho, woman; get thee gone
And lead lord Jason hither. . . .There is none

Like thee, to work me these high services.
But speak no word of what my purpose is,
As thou art faithful, thou, and bold to try
All succours, and a woman even as I!

[*The* NURSE *departs.*

CHORUS.

The sons of Erechtheus, the olden,
Whom high gods planted of yore
In an old land of heaven upholden,
A proud land untrodden of war:
They are hungered, and, lo, their desire
With wisdom is fed as with meat:
In their skies is a shining of fire,
A joy in the fall of their feet:
And thither, with manifold dowers,
From the North, from the hills, from the morn,
The Muses did gather their powers,
That a child of the Nine should be born;
And Harmony, sown as the flowers,
Grew gold in the acres of corn.

And Cephîsus, the fair-flowing river—
The Cyprian dipping her hand
Hath drawn of his dew, and the shiver
Of her touch is as joy in the land.
For her breathing in fragrance is written,
And in music her path as she goes,
And the cloud of her hair, it is litten
With stars of the wind-woven rose.
So fareth she ever and ever,
And forth of her bosom is blown,

As dews on the winds of the river,
An hunger of passions unknown,
Strong Loves of all godlike endeavour,
Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.

Some Women.

But Cephîsus the fair-flowing,
Will he bear thee on his shore?
Shall the land that succours all, succour thee,
Who art foul among thy kind,
With the tears of children blind?
Dost thou see the red gash growing,
Thine own burden dost thou see?
Every side, Every way,
Lo, we kneel to thee and pray:
By thy knees, by thy soul, O woman wild!
One at least thou canst not slay,
Not thy child!

Others.

Hast thou ice that thou shalt bind it
To thy breast, and make thee dead
To thy children, to thine own spirit's pain?
When the hand knows what it dares,
When thine eyes look into theirs,
Shalt thou keep by tears unblinded
Thy dividing of the slain?
These be deeds Not for thee:
These be things that cannot be!
Thy babes—though thine hardihood be fell,
When they cling about thy knee,
'Twill be well!

Enter JASON.

JASON.

I answer to thy call. Though full of hate
Thou be, I yet will not so far abate
My kindness for thee, nor refuse mine ear.
Say in what new desire thou hast called me here.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray thee, for my words but now
Spoken, forgive me. My bad moods. . . . Oh, thou
At least wilt strive to bear with them! There be
Many old deeds of love 'twixt me and thee.
Lo, I have reasoned with myself apart
And chidden: "Why must I be mad, O heart
Of mine: and raging against one whose word
Is wisdom: making me a thing abhorred
To them that rule the land, and to mine own
Husband, who doth but that which, being done,
Will help us all—to wed a queen, and get
Young kings for brethren to my sons? And yet
I rage alone, and cannot quit my rage—
What aileth me?—when God sends harbourage
So simple? Have I not my children? Know
I not we are but exiles, and must go
Beggared and friendless else?" Thought upon
thought
So pressed me, till I knew myself full-fraught
With bitterness of heart and blinded eyes.
So now—I give thee thanks: and hold thee wise

To have caught this anchor for our aid. The fool
Was I; who should have been thy friend, thy tool;
Gone wooing with thee, stood at thy bed-side
Serving, and welcomed duteously thy bride.
But, as we are, we are—I will not say
Mere evil—women! Why must thou to-day
Turn strange, and make thee like some evil thing,
Childish, to meet my childish passioning?
See, I surrender: and confess that then
I had bad thoughts, but now have turned again
And found my wiser mind. [*She claps her hands.*
Ho, children! Run
Quickly! Come hither, out into the sun,
[*The* CHILDREN *come from the house, followed by their* ATTENDANT.
And greet your father. Welcome him with us,
And throw quite, quite away, as mother does,
Your anger against one so dear. Our peace
Is made, and all the old bad war shall cease
For ever.—Go, and take his hand. . . .
[*As the* CHILDREN *go to* JASON, *she suddenly bursts into tears. The* CHILDREN *quickly return to her: she recovers herself, smiling amid her tears.*
Ah me,
I am full of hidden horrors! . . . Shall it be
A long time more, my children, that ye live
To reach to me those dear, dear arms? . . . Forgive!
I am so ready with my tears to-day,
And full of dread. . . . I sought to smooth away
The long strife with your father, and, lo, now
I have all drowned with tears this little brow!
[*She wipes the child's face.*

LEADER.

O'er mine eyes too there stealeth a pale tear:
Let the evil rest, O God, let it rest here!

JASON.

Woman, indeed I praise thee now, nor say
Ill of thine other hour. 'Tis nature's way,
A woman needs must stir herself to wrath,
When work of marriage by so strange a path
Crosseth her lord. But thou, thine heart doth wend
The happier road. Thou hast seen, ere quite the end,
What choice must needs be stronger: which to do
Shows a wise-minded woman. . . . And for you,
Children; your father never has forgot
Your needs. If God but help him, he hath wrought
A strong deliverance for your weakness. Yea,
I think you, with your brethren, yet one day
Shall be the mightiest voices in this land.
Do you grow tall and strong. Your father's hand
Guideth all else, and whatso power divine
Hath alway helped him. . . . Ah, may it be mine
To see you yet in manhood, stern of brow,
Strong-armed, set high o'er those that hate me. . . .
How?
Woman, thy face is turned. Thy cheek is swept
With pallor of strange tears. Dost not accept
Gladly and of good will my benisons?

MEDEA.

'Tis nothing. Thinking of these little ones. . .

JASON.

Take heart, then. I will guard them from all ill.

MEDEA.

I do take heart. Thy word I never will
Mistrust. Alas, a woman's bosom bears
But woman's courage, a thing born for tears.

JASON.

What ails thee?—All too sore thou weepest there.

MEDEA.

I was their mother! When I heard thy prayer
Of long life for them, there swept over me
A horror, wondering how these things shall be.
But for the matter of my need that thou
Should speak with me, part I have said, and now
Will finish.—Seeing it is the king's behest
To cast me out from Corinth . . . aye, and best,
Far best, for me—I know it—not to stay
Longer to trouble thee and those who sway
The realm, being held to all their house a foe. . . .
Behold, I spread my sails, and meekly go

To exile. But our children. . . . Could this land
Be still their home awhile: could thine own hand
But guide their boyhood. . . . Seek the king, and pray
His pity, that he bid thy children stay!

JASON.

He is hard to move. Yet surely 'twere well done.

MEDEA.

Bid her—for thy sake, for a daughter's boon. . . .

JASON.

Well thought! Her I can fashion to my mind.

MEDEA.

Surely. She is a woman like her kind. . . .
Yet I will aid thee in thy labour; I
Will send her gifts, the fairest gifts that lie
In the hands of men, things of the days of old,
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold,
By the boys' hands.—Go, quick, some handmaiden,
And fetch the raiment.

[*A handmaid goes into the house*

Ah, her cup shall then
Be filled indeed! What more should woman crave,
Being wed with thee, the bravest of the brave,

And girt with raiment which of old the sire
Of all my house, the Sun, gave, steeped in fire,
To his own fiery race?

[*The handmaid has returned bearing the Gifts.*

Come, children, lift
With heed these caskets. Bear them as your gift
To her, being bride and princess and of right
Blessed!—I think she will not hold them light.

JASON.

Fond woman, why wilt empty thus thine hand
Of treasure? Doth King Creon's castle stand
In stint of raiment, or in stint of gold?
Keep these, and make no gift. For if she hold
Jason of any worth at all, I swear
Chattels like these will not weigh more with her.

MEDEA.

Ah, chide me not! 'Tis written, gifts persuade
The gods in heaven; and gold is stronger made
Than words innumerable to bend men's ways.
Fortune is hers. God maketh great her days:
Young and a crownèd queen! And banishment
For those two babes. . . . I would not gold were spent,
But life's blood, ere that come.

My children, go
Forth into those rich halls, and, bowing low,
Beseech your father's bride, whom I obey,
Ye be not, of her mercy, cast away

Exiled: and give the caskets—above all
Mark this!—to none but her, to hold withal
And keep. . . . Go quick! And let your mother know
Soon the good tiding that she longs for. . . . Go!

[*She goes quickly into the house.* JASON *and the* CHILDREN *with their* ATTENDANT *depart.*

CHORUS.

Now I have no hope more of the children's living;
No hope more. They are gone forth unto death.
The bride, she taketh the poison of their giving:
She taketh the bounden gold and openeth;
And the crown, the crown, she lifteth about her brow,
Where the light brown curls are clustering. No hope now!

O sweet and cloudy gleam of the garments golden!
The robe, it hath clasped her breast and the crown her head.
Then, then, she decketh the bride, as a bride of olden
Story, that goeth pale to the kiss of the dead.
For the ring hath closed, and the portion of death is there;
And she flieth not, but perisheth unaware.

Some Women.

O bridegroom, bridegroom of the kiss so cold,
Art thou wed with princes, art thou girt with gold,

Who know'st not, suing
For thy child's undoing,
And, on her thou lovest, for a doom untold?
How art thou fallen from thy place of old!

Others.

O Mother, Mother, what hast thou to reap,
When the harvest cometh, between wake and sleep?
For a heart unslaken,
For a troth forsaken,
Lo, babes that call thee from a bloody deep:
And thy love returns not. Get thee forth and weep!

[*Enter the* ATTENDANT *with the two* CHILDREN: MEDEA *comes out from the house.*

ATTENDANT.

Mistress, these children from their banishment
Are spared. The royal bride hath mildly bent
Her hand to accept thy gifts, and all is now
Peace for the children.—Ha, why standest thou
Confounded, when good fortune draweth near?

MEDEA.

Ah God!

ATTENDANT.

This chimes not with the news I bear.

MEDEA.

O God, have mercy!

ATTENDANT.

Is some word of wrath
Here hidden that I knew not of? And hath
My hope to give thee joy so cheated me?

MEDEA.

Thou givest what thou givest: I blame not thee.

ATTENDANT.

Thy brows are all o'ercast: thine eyes are filled. . . .

MEDEA.

For bitter need, Old Man! The gods have willed,
And my own evil mind, that this should come.

ATTENDANT.

Take heart! Thy sons one day will bring thee home.

MEDEA.

Home? . . . I have others to send home. Woe's me!

ATTENDANT.

Be patient. Many a mother before thee
Hath parted from her children. We poor things
Of men must needs endure what fortune brings.

MEDEA.

I will endure.—Go thou within, and lay
All ready that my sons may need to-day.
[*The* ATTENDANT *goes into the house.*
O children, children mine: and you have found
A land and home, where, leaving me discrowned
And desolate, forever you will stay,
Motherless children! And I go my way
To other lands, an exile, ere you bring
Your fruits home, ere I see you prospering
Or know your brides, or deck the bridal bed,
All flowers, and lift your torches overhead.
Oh, cursèd be mine own hard heart! 'Twas all
In vain, then, that I reared you up, so tall
And fair; in vain I bore you, and was torn
With those long pitiless pains, when you were born.
Ah, wondrous hopes my poor heart had in you,
How you would tend me in mine age, and do
The shroud about me with your own dear hands,
When I lay cold, blessèd in all the lands
That knew us. And that gentle thought is dead!
You go, and I live on, to eat the bread
Of long years, to myself most full of pain.
And never your dear eyes, never again,
Shall see your mother, far away being thrown
To other shapes of life. . . . My babes, my own,
Why gaze ye so?—What is it that ye see?—
And laugh with that last laughter? . . . Woe is me,
What shall I do?
Women, my strength is gone,
Gone like a dream, since once I looked upon

Those shining faces. . . . I can do it not.
Good-bye to all the thoughts that burned so hot
Aforetime! I will take and hide them far,
Far, from men's eyes. Why should I seek a war
So blind: by these babes' wounds to sting again
Their father's heart, and win myself a pain
Twice deeper? Never, never! I forget
Henceforward all I laboured for.
And yet,
What is it with me? Would I be a thing
Mocked at, and leave mine enemies to sting
Unsmitten? It must be. O coward heart,
Ever to harbour such soft words!—Depart
Out of my sight, ye twain. [*The* CHILDREN *go in.*
And they whose eyes
Shall hold it sin to share my sacrifice,
On their heads be it! My hand shall swerve not now.

Ah, Ah, thou Wrath within me! Do not thou,
Do not. . . . Down, down, thou tortured thing, and spare
My children! They will dwell with us, aye, there
Far off, and give thee peace.
Too late, too late!
By all Hell's living agonies of hate,
They shall not take my little ones alive
To make their mock with! Howsoe'er I strive
The thing is doomed; it shall not escape now
From being. Aye, the crown is on the brow,
And the robe girt, and in the robe that high
Queen dying.
I know all. Yet . . seeing that I

Must go so long a journey, and these twain
A longer yet and darker, I would fain
Speak with them, ere I go.

[*A handmaid brings the* CHILDREN *out again.*

Come, children; stand
A little from me. There. Reach out your hand,
Your right hand—so—to mother: and good-bye!

[*She has kept them hitherto at arm's length: but at the touch of their hands, her resolution breaks down, and she gathers them passionately into her arms.*

Oh, darling hand! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,
And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,
May you be blessèd, but not here! What here
Was yours, your father stole. . . . Ah God, the glow
Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch; and Oh,
Sweet scent of childhood. . . . Go! Go! . . . Am I blind? . . .
Mine eyes can see not, when I look to find
Their places. I am broken by the wings
Of evil. . . Yea, I know to what bad things
I go, but louder than all thought doth cry
Anger, which maketh man's worst misery.

[*She follows the* CHILDREN *into the house.*

CHORUS.

My thoughts have roamed a cloudy land,
And heard a fierier music fall
Than woman's heart should stir withal:
And yet some Muse majestical,
Unknown, hath hold of woman's hand,
Seeking for Wisdom—not in all:

A feeble seed, a scattered band,
Thou yet shalt find in lonely places,
Not dead amongst us, nor our faces
Turned alway from the Muses' call.

And thus my thought would speak: that she
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known
Is nearer to felicity:
Unlit she goeth and alone,
With little understanding what
A child's touch means of joy or woe,
And many toils she beareth not.

But they within whose garden fair
That gentle plant hath blown, they go
Deep-written all their days with care—
To rear the children, to make fast
Their hold, to win them wealth; and then
Much darkness, if the seed at last
Bear fruit in good or evil men!
And one thing at the end of all
Abideth, that which all men dread:
The wealth is won, the limbs are bred
To manhood, and the heart withal
Honest: and, lo, where Fortune smiled,
Some change, and what hath fallen? Hark!
'Tis death slow winging to the dark,
And in his arms what was thy child.

What therefore doth it bring of gain
To man, whose cup stood full before,

That God should send this one thing more
Of hunger and of dread, a door
Set wide to every wind of pain?

[MEDEA *comes out alone from the house.*

MEDEA.

Friends, this long hour I wait on Fortune's eyes,
And strain my senses in a hot surmise
What passeth on that hill.—Ha! even now
There comes . . . 'tis one of Jason's men, I trow.
His wild-perturbèd breath doth warrant me
The tidings of some strange calamity

[*Enter* MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

O dire and ghastly deed! Get thee away,
Medea! Fly! Nor let behind thee stay
One chariot's wing, one keel that sweeps the seas. . . .

MEDEA.

And what hath chanced, to cause such flights as these?

MESSENGER.

The maiden princess lieth—and her sire,
The king—both murdered by thy poison-fire.

MEDEA.

Most happy tiding! Which thy name prefers
Henceforth among my friends and well-wishers.

MESSENGER.

What say'st thou? Woman, is thy mind within
Clear, and not raving? Thou art found in sin
Most bloody wrought against the king's high head,
And laughest at the tale, and hast no dread?

MEDEA.

I have words also that could answer well
Thy word. But take thine ease, good friend, and tell,
How died they? Hath it been a very foul
Death, prithee? That were comfort to my soul.

MESSENGER.

When thy two children, hand in hand entwined,
Came with their father, and passed on to find
The new-made bridal rooms, Oh, we were glad,
We thralls, who ever loved thee well, and had
Grief in thy grief. And straight there passed a word
From ear to ear, that thou and thy false lord
Had poured peace offering upon wrath foregone.
A right glad welcome gave we them, and one
Kissed the small hand, and one the shining hair:
Myself, for very joy, I followed where
The women's rooms are. There our mistress . . . she
Whom now we name so . . . thinking not to see
Thy little pair, with glad and eager brow
Sate waiting Jason. Then she saw, and slow
Shrouded her eyes, and backward turned again,
Sick that thy children should come near her. Then

Thy husband quick went forward, to entreat
The young maid's fitful wrath. "Thou will not meet
Love's coming with unkindness? Nay, refrain
Thy suddenness, and turn thy face again,
Holding as friends all that to me are dear,
Thine husband. And accept these robes they bear
As gifts: and beg thy father to unmake
His doom of exile on them—for my sake."
When once she saw the raiment, she could still
Her joy no more, but gave him all his will.
And almost ere the father and the two
Children were gone from out the room, she drew
The flowerèd garments forth, and sate her down
To her arraying: bound the golden crown
Through her long curls, and in a mirror fair
Arranged their separate clusters, smiling there
At the dead self that faced her. Then aside
She pushed her seat, and paced those chambers wide
Alone, her white foot poising delicately—
So passing joyful in those gifts was she!—
And many a time would pause, straight-limbed, and wheel
Her head to watch the long fold to her heel
Sweeping. And then came something strange. Her cheek
Seemed pale, and back with crooked steps and weak
Groping of arms she walked, and scarcely found
Her old seat, that she fell not to the ground.
Among the handmaids was a woman old
And grey, who deemed, I think, that Pan had hold

Upon her, or some spirit, and raised a keen
Awakening shout; till through her lips was seen
A white foam crawling, and her eyeballs back
Twisted, and all her face dead pale for lack
Of life: and while that old dame called, the cry
Turned strangely to its opposite, to die
Sobbing. Oh, swiftly then one woman flew
To seek her father's rooms, one for the new
Bridegroom, to tell the tale. And all the place
Was loud with hurrying feet.
So long a space
As a swift walker on a measured way
Would pace a furlong's course in, there she lay
Speechless, with veilèd lids. Then wide her eyes
She oped, and wildly, as she strove to rise,
Shrieked: for two diverse waves upon her rolled
Of stabbing death. The carcanet of gold
That gripped her brow was molten in a dire
And wondrous river of devouring fire.
And those fine robes, the gift thy children gave—
God's mercy!—everywhere did lap and lave
The delicate flesh; till up she sprang, and fled,
A fiery pillar, shaking locks and head
This way and that, seeking to cast the crown
Somewhere away. But like a thing nailed down
The burning gold held fast the anadem,
And through her locks, the more she scattered them,
Came fire the fiercer, till to earth she fell
A thing—save to her sire—scarce nameable,
And strove no more. That cheek of royal mien,
Where was it—or the place where eyes had been?

Only from crown and temples came faint blood
Shot through with fire. The very flesh, it stood
Out from the bones, as from a wounded pine
The gum starts, where those gnawing poisons fine
Bit in the dark—a ghastly sight! And touch
The dead we durst not. We had seen too much.
But that poor father, knowing not, had sped,
Swift to his daughter's room, and there the dead
Lay at his feet. He knelt, and groaning low,
Folded her in his arms, and kissed her: "Oh,
Unhappy child, what thing unnatural hath
So hideously undone thee? Or what wrath
Of gods, to make this old grey sepulchre
Childless of thee? Would God but lay me there
To die with thee, my daughter!" So he cried.
But after, when he stayed from tears, and tried
To uplift his old bent frame, lo, in the folds
Of those fine robes it held, as ivy holds
Strangling among your laurel boughs. Oh, then
A ghastly struggle came! Again, again,
Up on his knee he writhed; but that dead breast
Clung still to his: till, wild, like one possessed,
He dragged himself half free; and, lo, the live
Flesh parted; and he laid him down to strive
No more with death, but perish; for the deep
Had risen above his soul. And there they sleep,
At last, the old proud father and the bride,
Even as his tears had craved it, side by side.
For thee—Oh, no word more! Thyself will know
How best to baffle vengeance. . . . Long ago
I looked upon man's days, and found a grey
Shadow. And this thing more I surely say,

That those of all men who are counted wise,
Strong wits, devisers of great policies,
Do pay the bitterest toll. Since life began,
Hath there in God's eye stood one happy man?
Fair days roll on, and bear more gifts or less
Of fortune, but to no man happiness.

[*Exit* MESSENGER

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Wrath upon wrath, meseems, this day shall fall
From God on Jason! He hath earned it all.

Other Women.

O miserable maiden, all my heart
Is torn for thee, so sudden to depart
From thy king's chambers and the light above
To darkness, all for sake of Jason's love!

MEDEA.

Women, my mind is clear. I go to slay
My children with all speed, and then, away
From hence; not wait yet longer till they stand
Beneath another and an angrier hand
To die. Yea, howsoe'er I shield them, die
They must. And, seeing that they must, 'tis I
Shall slay them, I their mother, touched of none
Beside. Oh, up and get thine armour on,

My heart! Why longer tarry we to win
Our crown of dire inevitable sin?
Take up thy sword, O poor right hand of mine,
Thy sword: then onward to the thin-drawn line
Where life turns agony. Let there be naught
Of softness now: and keep thee from that thought,
'Born of thy flesh,' 'thine own belovèd.' Now,
For one brief day, forget thy children: thou
Shalt weep hereafter. Though thou slay them, yet
Sweet were they. . . . I am sore unfortunate.

[*She goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

Some Women.

O Earth, our mother; and thou
All-seër, arrowy crown
Of Sunlight, manward now
Look down, Oh, look down!
Look upon one accurst,
Ere yet in blood she twine
Red hands—blood that is thine!
O Sun, save her first!
She is thy daughter still,
Of thine own golden line;
Save her! Or shall man spill
The life divine?
Give peace, O Fire that diest not! Send thy spell
To stay her yet, to lift her afar, afar—
A torture-changèd spirit, a voice of Hell
Wrought of old wrongs and war!

Others.

Alas for the mother's pain
Wasted! Alas the dear
Life that was born in vain!
Woman, what mak'st thou here,
Thou from beyond the Gate
Where dim Symplêgades
Clash in the dark blue seas,
The shores where death doth wait?
Why hast thou taken on thee,
To make us desolate,
This anger of misery
And guilt of hate?
For fierce are the smitings back of blood once shed
Where love hath been: God's wrath upon them that kill,
And an anguished earth, and the wonder of the dead
Haunting as music still. . . .

[*A cry is heard within.*

A Woman.

Hark! Did ye hear? Heard ye the children's cry?

Another.

O miserable woman! O abhorred!

A Child within.

What shall I do? What is it? Keep me fast
From mother!

The Other Child.

I know nothing. Brother! Oh,
I think she means to kill us.

A Woman.

Let me go!
I will—Help! Help!—and save them at the last.

A Child.

Yes, in God's name! Help quickly ere we die!

The Other Child.

She has almost caught me now. She has a sword.

[*Many of the Women are now beating at the barred door to get in. Others are standing apart.*

Women at the door.

Thou stone, thou thing of iron! Wilt verily
Spill with thine hand that life, the vintage stored
Of thine own agony?

The Other Women.

A Mother slew her babes in days of yore,
One, only one, from dawn to eventide,
Ino, god-maddened, whom the Queen of Heaven
Set frenzied, flying to the dark: and she
Cast her for sorrow to the wide salt sea,
Forth from those rooms of murder unforgiven,
Wild-footed from a white crag of the shore,
And clasping still her children twain, she died.

O Love of Woman, charged with sorrow sore,
What hast thou wrought upon us? What beside
Resteth to tremble for?

[*Enter hurriedly* JASON *and Attendants.*

JASON.

Ye women by this doorway clustering
Speak, is the doer of the ghastly thing
Yet here, or fled? What hopeth she of flight?
Shall the deep yawn to shield her? Shall the height
Send wings, and hide her in the vaulted sky
To work red murder on her lords, and fly
Unrecompensed? But let her go! My care
Is but to save my children, not for her.
Let them she wronged requite her as they may.
I care not. 'Tis my sons I must some way
Save, ere the kinsmen of the dead can win
From them the payment of their mother's sin.

LEADER.

Unhappy man, indeed thou knowest not
What dark place thou art come to! Else, God wot,
Jason, no word like these could fall from thee.

JASON.

What is it?—Ha! The woman would kill me?

LEADER.

Thy sons are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

JASON.

How? Not the children. . . . I scarce understand. . . .
O God, thou hast broken me!

LEADER.

Think of those twain
As things once fair, that ne'er shall bloom again.

JASON.

Where did she murder them? In that old room?

LEADER.

Open, and thou shalt see thy children's doom.

JASON.

Ho, thralls! Unloose me yonder bars! Make more
Of speed! Wrench out the jointing of the door.
And show my two-edged curse, the children dead,
The woman. . . . Oh, this sword upon her
head. . . .

[*While the Attendants are still battering at the door* MEDEA *appears on the roof, standing on a chariot of winged Dragons, in which are the children's bodies.*

MEDEA.

What make ye at my gates? Why batter ye
With brazen bars, seeking the dead and me
Who slew them? Peace! . . . And thou, if aught
of mine
Thou needest, speak, though never touch of thine

Shall scathe me more. Out of his firmament
My fathers' father, the high Sun, hath sent
This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.

JASON.

Thou living hate! Thou wife in every age
Abhorrèd, blood-red mother, who didst kill
My sons, and make me as the dead: and still
Canst take the sunshine to thine eyes, and smell
The green earth, reeking from thy deed of hell;
I curse thee! Now, Oh, now mine eyes can see,
That then were blinded, when from savagery
Of eastern chambers, from a cruel land,
To Greece and home I gathered in mine hand
Thee, thou incarnate curse: one that betrayed
Her home, her father, her . . . Oh, God hath laid
Thy sins on me!—I knew, I knew, there lay
A brother murdered on thy hearth that day
When thy first footstep fell on Argo's hull. . . .
Argo, my own, my swift and beautiful
That was her first beginning. Then a wife
I made her in my house. She bore to life
Children: and now for love, for chambering
And men's arms, she hath murdered them! A thing
Not one of all the maids of Greece, not one,
Had dreamed of; whom I spurned, and for mine own
Chose thee, a bride of hate to me and death,
Tigress, not woman, beast of wilder breath

Than Skylla shrieking o'er the Tuscan sea.
Enough! No scorn of mine can reach to thee,
Such iron is o'er thine eyes. Out from my road,
Thou crime-begetter, blind with children's blood!
And let me weep alone the bitter tide
That sweepeth Jason's days, no gentle bride
To speak with more, no child to look upon
Whom once I reared . . . all, all for ever gone!

MEDEA.

An easy answer had I to this swell
Of speech, but Zeus our father knoweth well,
All I for thee have wrought, and thou for me.
So let it rest. This thing was not to be,
That thou shouldst live a merry life, my bed
Forgotten and my heart uncomforted,
Thou nor thy princess: nor the king that planned
Thy marriage drive Medea from his land,
And suffer not. Call me what thing thou please,
Tigress or Skylla from the Tuscan seas:
My claws have gripped thine heart, and all things shine.

JASON.

Thou too hast grief. Thy pain is fierce as mine.

MEDEA.

I love the pain, so thou shalt laugh no more.

JASON.

Oh, what a womb of sin my children bore!

MEDEA.

Sons, did ye perish for your father's shame?

JASON.

How? It was not my hand that murdered them.

MEDEA

'Twas thy false wooings, 'twas thy trampling pride.

JASON.

Thou hast said it! For thy lust of love they died.

MEDEA.

And love to women a slight thing should be?

JASON.

To women pure!—All thy vile life to thee!

MEDEA.

Think of thy torment. They are dead, they are dead!

JASON.

No: quick, great God; quick curses round thy head!

MEDEA.

The Gods know who began this work of woe.

JASON.

Thy heart and all its loathliness they know.

MEDEA.

Loathe on. . . . But, Oh, thy voice. It hurts me sore.

JASON.

Aye, and thine me. Wouldst hear me then no more?

MEDEA.

How? Show me but the way. 'Tis this I crave.

JASON.

Give me the dead to weep, and make their grave.

MEDEA.

Never! Myself will lay them in a still
Green sepulchre, where Hera by the Hill
Hath precinct holy, that no angry men
May break their graves and cast them forth again
To evil. So I lay on all this shore
Of Corinth a high feast for evermore
And rite, to purge them yearly of the stain
Of this poor blood. And I, to Pallas' plain
I go, to dwell beside Pandion's son,
Aegeus.—For thee, behold, death draweth on,
Evil and lonely, like thine heart: the hands
Of thine old Argo, rotting where she stands,

Shall smite thine head in twain, and bitter be
To the last end thy memories of me.

[*She rises on the chariot and is slowly borne away.*

JASON.

May They that hear the weeping child
Blast thee, and They that walk in blood!

MEDEA.

Thy broken vows, thy friends beguiled
Have shut for thee the ears of God.

JASON.

Go, thou art wet with children's tears!

MEDEA.

Go thou, and lay thy bride to sleep.

JASON.

Childless, I go, to weep and weep.

MEDEA.

Not yet! Age cometh and long years.

JASON.

My sons, mine own!

MEDEA.

Not thine, but mine . . .

JASON.

. . Who slew them!

MEDEA.

Yes: to torture thee.

JASON.

Once let me kiss their lips, once twine
Mine arms and touch. . . . Ah, woe is me!

MEDEA.

Wouldst love them and entreat? But now
They were as nothing.

JASON.

At the last,
O God, to touch that tender brow!

MEDEA.

Thy words upon the wind are cast.

JASON.

Thou, Zeus, wilt hear me. All is said
For naught. I am but spurned away
And trampled by this tigress, red
With children's blood. Yet, come what may,
So far as thou hast granted, yea,
So far as yet my strength may stand,
I weep upon these dead, and say
Their last farewell, and raise my hand

To all the daemons of the air
In witness of these things; how she
Who slew them, will not suffer me
To gather up my babes, nor bear
To earth their bodies; whom, O stone
Of women, would I ne'er had known
Nor gotten, to be slain by thee!
[*He casts himself upon the earth.*

CHORUS.

Great treasure halls hath Zeus in heaven,
From whence to man strange dooms be given,
Past hope or fear.
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought:
So hath it fallen here.

NOTES TO MEDEA

P. 3, l. 2, To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades.]—The Symplêgades ("Clashing") or Kuaneai ("Dark blue") were two rocks in the sea which used to clash together and crush anything that was between them. They stood above the north end of the Bosphorus and formed the Gate (l. 1264, p. 70) to the Axeinos Pontos, or "Stranger-less Sea," where all Greeks were murdered. At the farthest eastern end of that sea was the land of Colchis.

P. 3, l. 3, Pêlion.]—The great mountain in Thessaly. Iôlcos, a little kingdom between Pêlion and the sea, ruled originally by Aeson, Jason's father, then by the usurping Pĕlias.

P. 3, l. 9, Daugnters of Pĕlias.]—See Introduction, p. vii.

P. 4, l. 18, Wed.]—Medea was not legally married to Jason, and could not be, though in common parlance he is sometimes called her husband. Intermarriage between the subjects of two separate states was not possible in antiquity without a special treaty. And naturally there was no such treaty with Colchis.

This is, I think, the view of the play, and corresponds to the normal Athenian conceptions of society. In the original legend it is likely enough that Medea belongs to "matriarchal" times before the institution of marriage.

P. 4, l. 18, Head of Corinth.]—A peculiar word

(*αἰσυμνᾶν*) afterwards used to translate the Roman *dictator*. Creon is, however, apparently descended from the ancient king Sisyphus.

P. 4, l. 40, She hath a blade made keen, &c.]—These lines (40, 41) are repeated in a different context later on, p. 23, ll. 379, 380. The sword which to the Nurse suggested suicide was really meant for murder. There is a similar and equally dramatic repetition of the lines about the crown and wreath (786, 949, pp. 46, 54), and of those about the various characters popularly attributed to Medea (ll. 304, 808, pp. 18, 46).

P. 5, l. 48, ATTENDANT.]—Greek *Paidagôgos*, or "pedagogue"; a confidential servant who escorted the boys to and from school, and in similar ways looked after them. Notice the rather light and cynical character of this man, compared with the tenderness of the Nurse.

P. 5, l. 57, To this still earth and sky.]—Not a mere stage explanation. It was the ancient practice, if you had bad dreams or terrors of the night, to "show" them to the Sun in the morning, that he might clear them away.

P. 8, l. 111, Have I not suffered?]—Medea is apparently answering some would-be comforter. Cf. p. 4. ("If friends will speak," &c.)

P. 9, l. 131, CHORUS.]—As Dr. Verrall has remarked, the presence of the Chorus is in this play unusually awkward from the dramatic point of view. Medea's plot demands most absolute secrecy; and it is incredible that fifteen Corinthian women, simply because they were women, should allow a half-mad foreigner to murder several people, including their

own Corinthian king and princess—who was a woman also—rather than reveal her plot. We must remember in palliation (1) that these women belong to the faction in Corinth which was friendly to Medea and hostile to Creon; (2) that the appeal to them as women had more force in antiquity than it would now, and the princess had really turned traitor to her sex. (See note on this subject at the end of the present writer's translation of the *Electra*.) (3) The non-interference of the Chorus seems monstrous: yet in ancient times, when law was weak and punishment was chiefly the concern of the injured persons, and of no one else, the reluctance of bystanders to interfere was much greater than it is now in an ordered society. Some oriental countries, and perhaps even California or Texas, could afford us some startling instances of impassiveness among bystanders.

P. 12, l. 167, Oh, wild words!]—The Nurse breaks in, hoping to drown her mistress's dangerous self-betrayal. Medea's murder of her brother (see Introduction, p. vi) was by ordinary standards her worst act, and seems not to have been known in Corinth. It forms the climax of Jason's denunciation, l. 1334, p. 74.

P. 13, l. 190, Alas, the brave blithe bards, &c.]—Who is the speaker? According to the MSS. the Nurse, and there is some difficulty in taking the lines from her. Yet (1) she has no reason to sing a song outside after saying that she is going in; and (2) it is quite necessary that she should take a little time indoors persuading Medea to come out. The words seem to suit the lips of an impersonal Chorus.

The general sense of the poem is interesting. It is

an apology for tragedy. It gives the tragic poet's conception of the place of his art in the service of humanity, as against the usual feeling of the public, whose serious work is devoted to something else, and who "go to a play to be amused."

P. 14, l. 214, Women of Corinth, I am come, &c.]—These opening lines are a well-known *crux interpretum*. It is interesting to note, (1) that the Roman poet Ennius (ca. 200 B.C.) who translated the *Medea*, did not understand them in the least; while, on the other hand, the earliest Greek commentators seem not to have noticed that there was any difficulty in them worth commenting upon. That implies that while the acting tradition was alive and unbroken, the lines were easily understood; but when once the tradition failed, the meaning was lost. (The first commentator who deals with the passage is Irenaeus, a scholar of the Augustan time.)

P. 15, l. 231, A herb most bruised is woman.]—This fine statement of the wrongs of women in Athens doubtless contains a great deal of the poet's own mind; but from the dramatic point of view it is justified in several ways. (1) Medea is seeking for a common ground on which to appeal to the Corinthian women. (2) She herself is now in the position of all others in which a woman is most hardly treated as compared with a man. (3) Besides this, one can see that, being a person of great powers and vehement will, she feels keenly her lack of outlet. If she had men's work to do, she could be a hero: debarred from proper action (from τὸ πράσσειν, *Hip.* 1019) she is bound to make mischief. Cf. p. 24, ll. 408, 409. "Things most vain, &c."

There is a slight anachronism in applying the Attic

system of doweries to primitive times. Medea's contemporaries either lived in a "matriarchal" system without any marriage, or else were bought by their husbands for so many cows.

P. 17, l. 271, CREON.]—Observe the somewhat archaic abruptness of this scene, a sign of the early date of the play.

P. 18, l. 295, Wise beyond men's wont.]—Medea was a "wise woman" which in her time meant much the same as a witch or enchantress. She did really know more than other women; but most of this extra knowledge consisted—or was supposed to consist—either in lore of poisons and charms, or in useless learning and speculation.

P. 18, l. 304, A seed of strife, an Eastern dreamer, &c.]—The meaning of these various "ill names" is not certain. Cf. l. 808, p. 46. Most scholars take θατέρου τρόπου ("of the other sort") to mean "the opposite of a dreamer."

P. 20, ll. 333–4, What would I with thy pains?]—A conceit almost in the Elizabethan style, as if by taking "pains" away from Creon, she would have them herself.

P. 20, l. 335, Not that! Not that!]—Observe what a dislike Medea has of being touched: cf. l. 370 ("my flesh been never stained," &c.) and l. 496 ("poor, poor right hand of mine!"), pp. 22, and 28.

P. 22, l. 364, Defeat on every side.]—Observe (1) that in this speech Medea's vengeance is to take the form of a clear fight to the death against the three guilty persons. It is both courageous and, judged by the appropriate standard, just. (2) She wants to save

her own life, not from cowardice, but simply to make her revenge more complete. To kill her enemies and escape is victory. To kill them and die with them is only a drawn battle. Other enemies will live and "laugh." (3) Already in this first soliloquy there is a suggestion of that strain of madness which becomes unmistakable later on in the play. ("Oh, I have tried so many thoughts of murder," &c., and especially the lashing of her own fury, "Awake thee now, Medea.")

P. 24, l. 405, Thief's daughter: lit. "a child of Sisyphus."]—Sisyphus, an ancient king of Corinth, was one of the well-known sinners punished in Tartarus. Medea's father, Aiêtês, was a brother of Circe, and born of the Sun.

P. 24, l. 409, Things most vain for help.]—See on ll. 230 ff.

P. 24, ll. 410–430, CHORUS.]—The song celebrates the coming triumph of Woman in her rebellion against Man; not by any means Woman as typifying the domestic virtues, but rather as the downtrodden, uncivilised, unreasoning, and fiercely emotional half of humanity. A woman who in defence of her honour and her rights will die sword in hand, slaying the man who wronged her, seems to the Chorus like a deliverer of the whole sex.

P. 24, l. 421, Old bards.]—Early literature in most countries contains a good deal of heavy satire on women: *e.g.* Hesiod's "Who trusts a woman trusts a thief;" or Phocylides' "Two days of a woman are very sweet: when you marry her and when you carry her to her grave."

It is curious how the four main Choruses of the

Medea are divided each into two parts, distinct in subject and in metre.

P. 25, l. 439, Faith is no more sweet.]—Copied from a beautiful passage in Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 198 ff.: "There shall be no more sweetness found in the faithful man nor the righteous. . . . And at last up to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth, shrouding with white raiment their beautiful faces, go Ruth and Rebuking." (Aidos and Nemesis: *i.e.* the Ruth or Shame that you feel with reference to your own actions, and the Indignation or Disapproval that others feel.)

P. 27, ll. 478 ff., Bulls of fiery breath.]—Among the tasks set him by Aiêtês, Jason had to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, and plough with them a certain Field of Ares, sow the field with dragon's teeth, and reap a harvest of earth-born or giant warriors which sprang from the seed. When all this was done, there remained the ancient serpent coiled round the tree where the Golden Fleece was hanging.

P. 29, l. 507, The first friends who sheltered me.]—*i.e.* the kindred of Pelias.

P. 29, l. 509, Blest of many a maid in Hellas.]—Jason was, of course, the great romantic hero of his time. Cf. his own words, l. 1340, p. 74.

Pp. 29 ff., ll. 523–575.—Jason's defence is made the weaker by his reluctance to be definitely insulting to Medea. He dares not say: "You think that, because you conceived a violent passion for me,—to which, I admit, I partly responded—I must live with you always; but the truth is, you are a savage with whom a civilised man cannot go on living." This point

comes out unveiled in his later speech, l. 1329, ff., p. 74.

P. 30, ll. 536 ff., Our ordered life and justice.]—Jason has brought the benefits of civilisation to Medea! He is doubtless sincere, but the peculiar ironic cruelty of the plea is obvious.

P. 30, ll. 541 ff., The story of Great Medea, &c. . . . Unless our deeds have glory.]—This, I think, is absolutely sincere. To Jason ambition is everything. And, as Medea has largely shared his great deeds with him, he thinks that she cannot but feel the same. It seems to him contemptible that her mere craving for personal love should outweigh all the possible glories of life.

P. 31, l. 565, What more need hast thou of children?]—He only means, "of more children than you now have." But the words suggest to Medea a different meaning, and sow in her mind the first seed of the child-murder. See on the Aegeus scene below.

P. 34, l. 608, A living curse.]—Though she spoke no word, the existence of a being so deeply wronged would be a curse on her oppressors. So a murdered man's blood, or an involuntary cry of pain (Aesch. *Ag.* 237) on the part of an injured person is in itself fraught with a curse.

P. 35, ll. 627–641, Chorus. Alas, the Love, &c.]—A highly characteristic Euripidean poem, keenly observant of fact, yet with a lyrical note penetrating all its realism. A love which really produces "good to man and glory," is treated in the next chorus, l. 844 ff., p. 49.

Pp. 37 ff., ll. 663–759, Aegeus.]—This scene is

generally considered to be a mere blot on the play, not, I think, justly. It is argued that the obvious purpose which the scene serves, the provision of an asylum for Medea, has no keen dramatic interest. The spectator would just as soon, or sooner, have her die. And, besides, her actual mode of escape is largely independent of Aegeus. Further, the arrival of Aegeus at this moment seems to be a mere coincidence (*Ar. Poetics*, 61 b, 23), and one cannot help suspecting that the Athenian poet was influenced by mere local interests in dragging in the Athenian king and the praises of Athens where they were not specially appropriate.

To these criticisms one may make some answer. (1) As to the coincidence, it is important to remember always that Greek tragedies are primarily historical plays, not works of fiction. They are based on definite *Logoi* or traditions (*Frogs*, l. 1052, p. 254) and therefore can, and should, represent accidental coincidences when it was a datum of the tradition that these coincidences actually happened. By Aristotle's time the practice had changed. The tragedies of his age were essentially fiction; and he tends to criticise the ancient tragedies by fictional standards.

Now it was certainly a datum in the Medea legend that she took refuge with Aegeus, King of Athens, and was afterwards an enemy to his son Theseus; but I think we may go further. This play pretty certainly has for its foundation the rites performed by the Corinthians at the Grave of the Children of Medea in the precinct of Hera Acraia near Corinth. See on l. 1379. p. 77. The legend in such cases is usually invented to

explain the ritual; and I suspect that in the ritual, and, consequently, in the legend, there were two other data: first, a pursuit of Medea and her flight on a dragon-chariot, and, secondly, a meeting between Medea and Aegeus. (Both subjects are frequent on vase paintings, and may well be derived from historical pictures in some temple at Corinth.)

Thus, the meeting with Aegeus is probably not the free invention of Euripides, but one of the data supplied to him by his subject. But he has made it serve, as von Arnim was the first to perceive, a remarkable dramatic purpose. Aegeus was under a curse of childlessness, and his desolate condition suggests to Medea the ultimate form of her vengeance. She will make Jason childless. Cf. l. 670, "Children! Ah God, art childless?" (A childless king in antiquity was a miserable object: likely to be deposed and dishonoured, and to miss his due worship after death. See the fragments of Euripides' *Oineus*.)

There is also a further purpose in the scene, of a curious and characteristic kind. In several plays of Euripides, when a heroine hesitates on the verge of a crime, the thing that drives her over the brink is some sudden and violent lowering of her self-respect. Thus Phædra writes her false letter immediately after her public shame. Creûsa in the *Ion* turns murderous only after crying in the god's ears the story of her seduction. Medea, a princess and, as we have seen, a woman of rather proud chastity, feels, after the offer which she makes to Aegeus in this scene (l. 716 ff., p. 42), that she need shrink from nothing.

P. 38, l. 681, The hearth-stone of my sires of yore.]

—This sounds as if it meant Aegeus' own house: in reality, by an oracular riddle, it meant the house of Pittheus, by whose daughter, Aethra, Aegeus became the father of Theseus.

P. 43, l. 731, An oath wherein to trust.]—Observe that Medea is deceiving Aegeus. She intends to commit a murder before going to him, and therefore wishes to bind him down so firmly that, however much he wish to repudiate her, he shall be unable. Hence this insistence on the oath and the exact form of the oath. (At this time, apparently, she scarcely thinks of the children, only of her revenge.)

P. 46, l. 808, No eastern dreamer, &c.]—See on l. 304.

P. 47, l. 820, *The* NURSE *comes out.*]—There is no indication in the original to show who comes out. But it is certainly a woman; as certainly it is not one of the Chorus; and Medea's words suit the Nurse well. It is an almost devilish act to send the Nurse, who would have died rather than take such a message had she understood it.

P. 48, ll. 824–846, The sons of Erechtheus, &c.]—This poem is interesting as showing the ideal conception of Athens entertained by a fifth-century Athenian. One might compare with it Pericles' famous speech in Thucydides, ii., where the emphasis is laid on Athenian "plain living and high thinking" and the freedom of daily life. Or, again, the speeches of Aethra in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where more stress is laid on mercy and championship of the oppressed.

The allegory of "Harmony," as a sort of Korê, or Earth-maiden, planted by all the Muses in the soil of Attica, seems to be an invention of the poet. Not any

given Art or Muse, but a spirit which unites and harmonises all, is the special spirit of Athens. The Attic connection with Erôs, on the other hand, is old and traditional. But Euripides has transformed the primitive nature-god into a mystic and passionate longing for "all manner of high deed," a Love which, different from that described in the preceding chorus, really ennobles human life.

This first part of the Chorus is, of course, suggested by Aegeus; the second is more closely connected with the action of the play. "How can Medea dream of asking that stainless land to shelter her crimes? But the whole plan of her revenge is not only wicked but impossible. She simply could not do such a thing, if she tried."

Pp. 50 ff., l. 869, The second scene with Jason.]—Dicæarchus, and perhaps his master Aristotle also, seems to have complained of Medea's bursting into tears in this scene, instead of acting her part consistently—a very prejudiced criticism. What strikes one about Medea's assumed rôle is that in it she remains so like herself and so unlike another woman. Had she really determined to yield to Jason, she would have done so in just this way, keen-sighted and yet passionate. One is reminded of the deceits of half-insane persons, which are due not so much to conscious art as to the emergence of another side of the personality.

P. 54, l. 949, Fine robings, &c.]—Repeated from l. 786, p. 46, where it came full in the midst of Medea's avowal of her murderous purpose. It startles one here, almost as though she had spoken out the word "murder" in some way which Jason could not understand.

P. 56, l. 976, CHORUS.]—The inaction of the Chorus women during the last scene will not bear thinking about, if we regard them as real human beings, like, for instance, the Bacchæ and the Trojan Women in the plays that bear their name. Still there is not only beauty, but, I think, great dramatic value in the conventional and almost mystical quality of this Chorus, and also in the low and quiet tone of that which follows, l. 1081 ff.

P. 59, ll. 1021 ff., Why does Medea kill her children?]—She acts not for one clearly stated reason, like a heroine in Sardou, but for many reasons, both conscious and subconscious, as people do in real life. Any analysis professing to be exact would be misleading, but one may note some elements in her feeling: (1) She had played dangerously long with the notion of making Jason childless. (2) When she repented of this (l. 1046, p. 60) the children had already been made the unconscious murderers of the princess. They were certain to be slain, perhaps with tortures, by the royal kindred. (3) Medea might take them with her to Athens and trust to the hope of Aegeus' being able and willing to protect them. But it was a doubtful chance, and she would certainly be in a position of weakness and inferiority if she had the children to protect. (4) In the midst of her passionate half-animal love for the children, there was also an element of hatred, because they were Jason's: cf. l. 112, p. 8. (5) She also seems to feel, in a sort of wild-beast way, that by killing them she makes them more her own: cf. l. 793, p. 46, "Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away;" l. 1241, p. 68, "touched of none beside." (6)

Euripides had apparently observed how common it is, when a woman's mind is deranged by suffering, that her madness takes the form of child-murder. The terrible lines in which Medea speaks to the "Wrath" within her, as if it were a separate being (l. 1056, p. 60), seem to bear out this view.

P. 59, l. 1038, Other shapes of life.]—A mystical conception of death. Cf. *Ion*, 1067, where almost exactly the same phrase is used.

P. 61, l. 1078, I know to what bad deeds, &c.]—This expression of double consciousness was immensely famous in antiquity. It is quoted by Lucian, Plutarch, Clement, Galen, Synesius, Hierocles, Arrian, Simplicius, besides being imitated, *e.g.* by Ovid: "video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor."

P. 63, l. 1123 ff., MESSENGER.]—A pendant to the Attendant's entrance above, l. 1002. The Attendant, bringing apparently good news, is received with a moan of despair, the Messenger of calamity with serene satisfaction. Cf. the Messenger who announces the death of Pentheus in the *Bacchæ*.

P. 65, l. 1162, Dead self.]—The reflection in the glass, often regarded as ominous or uncanny in some way.

P. 66, l. 1176, The cry turned strangely to its opposite.]—The notion was that an evil spirit could be scared away by loud cheerful shouts—*ololugæ*. But while this old woman is making an *ololugê*, she sees that the trouble is graver than she thought, and the cheerful cry turns into a wail.

P. 68, l. 1236, Women, my mind is clear.]—With the silence in which Medea passes over the success

of her vengeance compare Theseus' words, *Hip.*, l. 1260, "I laugh not, neither weep, at this fell doom."

P. 69, l. 1249, Thou shalt weep hereafter.]—Cf. *Othello*, v. ii., "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kiss thee, And love thee after."

P. 69, ll. 1251 ff.—This curious prayer to the Sun to "save" Medea—both from the crime of killing her children and the misfortune of being caught by her enemies—is apparently meant to prepare us for the scene of the Dragon Chariot. Notice the emphasis laid on the divine origin of Medea's race and her transformation to "a voice of Hell."

P. 71, ll. 1278 ff., Death of the children.]—The door is evidently barred, since Jason has to use crowbars to open it in l. 1317. Cf. the end of Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles.*

P. 71, l. 1281, A mother slew her babes in days of yore, &c.]—Ino, wife of Athamas, King of Thebes, nursed the infant Dionysus. For this Hera punished her with madness. She killed her two children, Learchus and Melicertes, and leaped into the sea. (There are various versions of the story.)—Observe the technique: just as the strain is becoming intolerable, we are turned away from tragedy to pure poetry. See on *Hip.* 731.

P. 74, l. 1320, This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.]—There is nothing in the words of the play to show what "this" is, but the Scholiast explains it as a chariot drawn by winged serpents, and the stage tradition seems to be clear on the subject. See note to the Aegeus scene (p. 88).

This first appearance of Medea "above, on the

tower" (Scholiast) seems to me highly effective. The result is to make Medea into something like a *dea ex machinâ*, who prophesies and pronounces judgment. See Introduction.

P. 76, l. 1370, They are dead, they are dead!]—This wrangle, though rather like some scenes in Norse sagas, is strangely discordant for a Greek play. It seems as if Euripides had deliberately departed from his usual soft and reflective style of ending in order to express the peculiar note of discord which is produced by the so-called "satisfaction" of revenge. Medea's curious cry: "Oh, thy voice! It hurts me sore!" shows that the effect is intentional.

P. 77, l. 1379, A still green sepulchre.]—There was a yearly festival in the precinct of Hera Acraia, near Corinth, celebrating the deaths of Medea's children. This festival, together with its ritual and "sacred legend," evidently forms the germ of the whole tragedy. Cf. the Trozenian rites over the tomb of Hippolytus, *Hip.* 1424 ff.

P. 77, l. 1386, The hands of thine old Argo.]—Jason, left friendless and avoided by his kind, went back to live with his old ship, now rotting on the shore. While he was sleeping under it, a beam of wood fell upon him and broke his head. It is a most grave mistake to treat the line as spurious.

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EURIPIDES: The Trojan Women. Translated into English verse.

EURIPIDES: Electra. Translated into English verse.

THE TROJAN WOMEN OF EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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THE TROJAN WOMEN

In his clear preface, Gilbert Murray says with truth that *The Trojan Women,* valued by the usage of the stage, is not a perfect play. "It is only the crying of one of the great wrongs of the world wrought into music." Yet it is one of the greater dramas of the elder world. In one situation, with little movement, with few figures, it flashes out a great dramatic lesson, the infinite pathos of a successful wrong. It has in it the very soul of the tragic. It even goes beyond the limited tragic, and hints that beyond the defeat may come a greater glory than will be the fortune of the victors. And thus through its pity and terror it purifies our souls to thoughts of peace.

Great art has no limits of locality or time. Its tidings are timeless, and its messages are universal. *The Trojan Women* was first performed in 415 B.C., from a story of the siege of Troy which even then was ancient history. But the pathos of it is as modern to us as it was to the Athenians. The terrors of war have not changed in three thousand years. Euripides had that to say of war which we have to say of it to-day, and had learned that which we are even now learning, that when most triumphant it brings as much wretchedness to the victors as to the vanquished. In this play the great conquest "seems to be a great joy and is in truth a great misery." The

tragedy of war has in no essential altered. The god Poseidon mourns over Troy as he might over the cities of to-day, when he cries:

"How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!"

To the cities of this present day might the prophetess Cassandra speak her message:

"Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!"

A throb of human sympathy as if with one of our sisters of to-day comes to us at the end, when the city is destroyed and its queen would throw herself, living, into its flames. To be of the action of this play the imagination needs not to travel back over three thousand years of history. It can simply leap a thousand leagues of ocean.

If ever wars are to be ended, the imagination of man must end them. To the common mind, in spite of all its horrors, there is still something glorious in war. Preachers have preached against it in vain; economists have argued against its wastefulness in vain. The imagination of a great poet alone can finally show to the imagination of the world that even the glories of war are an empty delusion. Euripides shows us, as the centre of his drama,

women battered and broken by inconceivable torture —the widowed Hecuba, Andromache with her child dashed to death, Cassandra ravished and made mad— yet does he show that theirs are the unconquered and unconquerable spirits. The victorious men, flushed with pride, have remorse and mockery dealt out to them by those they fought for, and go forth to unpitied death. Never surely can a great tragedy seem more real to us, or purge our souls more truly of the unreality of our thoughts and feelings concerning vital issues, than can *The Trojan Women* at this moment of the history of the world.

FRANCIS HOVEY STODDARD.

May the first, 1915.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

JUDGED by common standards, the *Troädes* is far from a perfect play; it is scarcely even a good play. It is an intense study of one great situation, with little plot, little construction, little or no relief or variety. The only movement of the drama is a gradual extinguishing of all the familiar lights of human life, with, perhaps, at the end, a suggestion that in the utterness of night, when all fears of a possible worse thing are passed, there is in some sense peace and even glory. But the situation itself has at least this dramatic value, that it is different from what it seems.

The consummation of a great conquest, a thing celebrated in paeans and thanksgivings, the very height of the day-dreams of unregenerate man—it seems to be a great joy, and it is in truth a great misery. It is conquest seen when the thrill of battle is over, and nothing remains but to wait and think. We feel in the background the presence of the conquerors, sinister and disappointed phantoms; of the conquered men, after long torment, now resting in death. But the living drama for Euripides lay in the conquered women. It is from them that he has named his play and built up his scheme of parts: four figures clearly lit and heroic, the others in varying grades of characterisation, nameless and barely articulate, mere half-heard voices of an eternal sorrow.

Indeed, the most usual condemnation of the play is not that it is dull, but that it is too harrowing; that scene after scene passes beyond the due limits of tragic art. There are points to be pleaded against this criticism. The very beauty of the most fearful scenes, in spite of their fearfulness, is one; the quick comfort of the lyrics is another, falling like a spell of peace when the strain is too hard to bear (cf. p. 89). But the main defence is that, like many of the greatest works of art, the *Troädes* is something more than art. It is also a prophecy, a bearing of witness. And the prophet, bound to deliver his message, walks outside the regular ways of the artist.

For some time before the *Troädes* was produced, Athens, now entirely in the hands of the War Party, had been engaged in an enterprise which, though on military grounds defensible, was bitterly resented by the more humane minority, and has been selected by Thucydides as the great crucial crime of the war. She had succeeded in compelling the neutral Dorian island of Mêlos to take up arms against her, and after a long siege had conquered the quiet and immemorially ancient town, massacred the men and sold the women and children into slavery. Mêlos fell in the autumn of 416 B.C. The *Troädes* was produced in the following spring. And while the gods of the prologue were prophesying destruction at sea for the sackers of Troy, the fleet of the sackers of Mêlos, flushed with conquest and marked by a slight but unforgettable taint of sacrilege, was actually preparing to set sail for its fatal enterprise against Sicily.

Not, of course, that we have in the *Troädes* a case of political allusion. Far from it. Euripides does not

mean Mêlos when he says Troy, nor mean Alcibiades' fleet when he speaks of Agamemnon's. But he writes under the influence of a year which to him, as to Thucydides, had been filled full of indignant pity and of dire foreboding. This tragedy is perhaps, in European literature, the first great expression of the spirit of pity for mankind exalted into a moving principle; a principle which has made the most precious, and possibly the most destructive, elements of innumerable rebellions, revolutions, and martyrdoms, and of at least two great religions.

Pity is a rebel passion. Its hand is against the strong, against the organised force of society, against conventional sanctions and accepted Gods. It is the Kingdom of Heaven within us fighting against the brute powers of the world; and it is apt to have those qualities of unreason, of contempt for the counting of costs and the balancing of sacrifices, of recklessness, and even, in the last resort, of ruthlessness, which so often mark the paths of heavenly things and the doings of the children of light. It brings not peace, but a sword.

So it was with Euripides. The *Troädes* itself has indeed almost no fierceness and singularly little thought of revenge. It is only the crying of one of the great wrongs of the world wrought into music, as it were, and made beautiful by "the most tragic of the poets." But its author lived ever after in a deepening atmosphere of strife and even of hatred, down to the day when, "because almost all in Athens rejoiced at his suffering," he took his way to the remote valleys of Macedon to write the *Bacchae* and to die.

G. M.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THE GOD POSEIDON.
THE GODDESS PALLAS ATHENA.

HECUBA, *Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hector and Paris.*
CASSANDRA, *daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess.*
ANDROMACHE, *wife of Hector, Prince of Troy.*
HELEN, *wife of Menelaüs, King of Sparta; carried off by Paris, Prince of Troy.*

TALTHYBIUS, *Herald of the Greeks.*
MENELAUS, *King of Sparta, and, together with his brother Agamemnon, General of the Greeks.*

SOLDIERS ATTENDANT ON TALTHYBIUS AND MENELAUS.
CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN, YOUNG AND OLD, MAIDEN AND MARRIED.

The Troädes was first acted in the year 415 B.C. *"The first prize was won by Xenocles, whoever he may have been, with the four plays Oedipus, Lycaön, Bacchae and Athamas, a Satyr-play. The second by Euripides with the Alexander, Palamêdês, Troädes and Sisyphus, a Satyr-play."*—AELIAN, *Varia Historia,* ii. 8.

THE TROJAN WOMEN

The scene represents a battlefield, a few days after the battle. At the back are the walls of Troy, partially ruined. In front of them, to right and left, are some huts, containing those of the Captive Women who have been specially set apart for the chief Greek leaders. At one side some dead bodies of armed men are visible. In front a tall woman with white hair is lying on the ground asleep.

It is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The figure of the god POSEIDON *is dimly seen before the walls.*

POSEIDON.

Up from Aegean caverns, pool by pool
Of blue salt sea, where feet most beautiful
Of Nereïd maidens weave beneath the foam
Their long sea-dances, I, their lord, am come,
Poseidon of the Sea. 'Twas I whose power,
With great Apollo, builded tower by tower
These walls of Troy; and still my care doth stand
True to the ancient People of my hand;
Which now as smoke is perished, in the shock
Of Argive spears. Down from Parnassus' rock
The Greek Epeios came, of Phocian seed,
And wrought by Pallas' mysteries a Steed
Marvellous, big with arms; and through my wall
It passed, a death-fraught image magical.

The groves are empty and the sanctuaries
Run red with blood. Unburied Priam lies
By his own hearth, on God's high altar-stair,
And Phrygian gold goes forth and raiment rare
To the Argive ships; and weary soldiers roam
Waiting the wind that blows at last for home,
For wives and children, left long years away,
Beyond the seed's tenth fullness and decay,
To work this land's undoing.
And for me,
Since Argive Hera conquereth, and she
Who wrought with Hera to the Phrygians' woe,
Pallas, behold, I bow mine head and go
Forth from great Ilion and mine altars old.
When a still city lieth in the hold
Of Desolation, all God's spirit there
Is sick and turns from worship.—Hearken where
The ancient River waileth with a voice
Of many women, portioned by the choice
Of war amid new lords, as the lots leap
For Thessaly, or Argos, or the steep
Of Theseus' Rock. And others yet there are,
High women, chosen from the waste of war
For the great kings, behind these portals hid;
And with them that Laconian Tyndarid,
Helen, like them a prisoner and a prize.
And this unhappy one—would any eyes
Gaze now on Hecuba? Here at the Gates
She lies 'mid many tears for many fates
Of wrong. One child beside Achilles' grave
In secret slain, Polyxena the brave,
Lies bleeding. Priam and his sons are gone;
And, lo, Cassandra, she the Chosen One,

Whom Lord Apollo spared to walk her way
A swift and virgin spirit, on this day
Lust hath her, and she goeth garlanded
A bride of wrath to Agamemnon's bed.

[*He turns to go; and another divine Presence becomes visible in the dusk. It is the goddess* PALLAS ATHENA.

O happy long ago, farewell, farewell,
Ye shining towers and mine old citadel;
Broken by Pallas, Child of God, or still
Thy roots had held thee true.

PALLAS.

Is it the will
Of God's high Brother, to whose hand is given
Great power of old, and worship of all Heaven,
To suffer speech from one whose enmities
This day are cast aside?

POSEIDON.

His will it is:
Kindred and long companionship withal,
Most high Athena, are things magical.

PALLAS.

Blest be thy gentle mood!—Methinks I see
A road of comfort here, for thee and me.

POSEIDON.

Thou hast some counsel of the Gods, or word
Spoken of Zeus? Or is it tidings heard
From some far Spirit?

PALLAS.

For this Ilion's sake,
Whereon we tread, I seek thee, and would make
My hand as thine.

POSEIDON.

Hath that old hate and deep
Failed, where she lieth in her ashen sleep?
Thou pitiest her?

PALLAS.

Speak first; wilt thou be one
In heart with me and hand till all be done?

POSEIDON.

Yea; but lay bare thy heart. For this land's sake
Thou comest, not for Hellas?

PALLAS.

I would make
Mine ancient enemies laugh for joy, and bring
On these Greek ships a bitter homecoming.

POSEIDON.

Swift is thy spirit's path, and strange withal,
And hot thy love and hate, where'er they fall.

PALLAS.

A deadly wrong they did me, yea within
Mine holy place: thou knowest?

POSEIDON.

I know the sin
Of Ajax, when he cast Cassandra down . . .

PALLAS.

And no man rose and smote him; not a frown
Nor word from all the Greeks!

POSEIDON.

And 'twas thine hand
That gave them Troy!

PALLAS.

Therefore with thee I stand
To smite them.

POSEIDON.

All thou cravest, even now
Is ready in mine heart. What seekest thou?

PALLAS.

An homecoming that striveth ever more
And cometh to no home.

POSEIDON.

Here on the shore
Wouldst hold them or amid mine own salt foam?

PALLAS.

When the last ship hath bared her sail for home!
Zeus shall send rain, long rain and flaw of driven
Hail, and a whirling darkness blown from heaven;

To me his levin-light he promiseth
O'er ships and men, for scourging and hot death:
Do thou make wild the roads of the sea, and steep
With war of waves and yawning of the deep,
Till dead men choke Euboea's curling bay.
So Greece shall dread even in an after day
My house, nor scorn the Watchers of strange lands!

POSEIDON.

I give thy boon unbartered. These mine hands
Shall stir the waste Aegean; reefs that cross
The Delian pathways, jag-torn Myconos,
Scyros and Lemnos, yea, and storm-driven
Caphêreus with the bones of drownèd men
Shall glut him.—Go thy ways, and bid the Sire
Yield to thine hand the arrows of his fire.
Then wait thine hour, when the last ship shall wind
Her cable coil for home! [*Exit* PALLAS.
How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!
[*Exit* POSEIDON.

The day slowly dawns: HECUBA *wakes.*

HECUBA.

Up from the earth, O weary head!
This is not Troy, about, above—
Not Troy, nor we the lords thereof.
Thou breaking neck, be strengthenèd!

Endure and chafe not. The winds rave
  And falter. Down the world's wide road,
  Float, float where streams the breath of God;
Nor turn thy prow to breast the wave.

Ah woe! . . . For what woe lacketh here?
  My children lost, my land, my lord.
  O thou great wealth of glory, stored
Of old in Ilion, year by year

We watched . . . and wert thou nothingness?
  What is there that I fear to say?
  And yet, what help? . . . Ah, well-a-day,
This ache of lying, comfortless

And haunted! Ah, my side, my brow
  And temples! All with changeful pain
  My body rocketh, and would fain
Move to the tune of tears that flow:
For tears are music too, and keep
A song unheard in hearts that weep.
  [*She rises and gazes towards the Greek ships far off on the shore.*

O ships, O crowding faces
  Of ships, O hurrying beat
  Of oars as of crawling feet,
How found ye our holy places?
Threading the narrows through,
  Out from the gulfs of the Greek,
Out to the clear dark blue,
  With hate ye came and with joy,
And the noise of your music flew,
  Clarion and pipe did shriek,

As the coilèd cords ye threw,
  Held in the heart of Troy!

What sought ye then that ye came?
  A woman, a thing abhorred:
  A King's wife that her lord
Hateth: and Castor's shame
  Is hot for her sake, and the reeds
Of old Eurôtas stir
With the noise of the name of her.
  She slew mine ancient King,
  The Sower of fifty Seeds,
    And cast forth mine and me,
  As shipwrecked men, that cling
    To a reef in an empty sea.

Who am I that I sit
  Here at a Greek king's door,
Yea, in the dust of it?
  A slave that men drive before,
A woman that hath no home,
  Weeping alone for her dead;
  A low and bruisèd head,
And the glory struck therefrom.
[*She starts up from her solitary brooding, and calls to the other Trojan Women in the huts.*

O Mothers of the Brazen Spear,
  And maidens, maidens, brides of shame,
  Troy is a smoke, a dying flame;
Together we will weep for her:
I call ye as a wide-wing'd bird
  Calleth the children of her fold,

To cry, ah, not the cry men heard
In Ilion, not the songs of old,
That echoed when my hand was true
On Priam's sceptre, and my feet
Touched on the stone one signal beat,
And out the Dardan music rolled;
And Troy's great Gods gave ear thereto.
[*The door of one of the huts on the right opens, and the Women steal out severally, startled and afraid.*

FIRST WOMAN. [*Strophe* 1.

How say'st thou? Whither moves thy cry,
Thy bitter cry? Behind our door
We heard thy heavy heart outpour
Its sorrow: and there shivered by
Fear and a quick sob shaken
From prisoned hearts that shall be free no more!

HECUBA.

Child, 'tis the ships that stir upon the shore . . .

SECOND WOMAN.

The ships, the ships awaken!

THIRD WOMAN.

Dear God, what would they? Overseas
Bear me afar to strange cities?

HECUBA.

Nay, child, I know not. Dreams are these,
Fears of the hope-forsaken.

FIRST WOMAN.

Awake, O daughters of affliction, wake
And learn your lots! Even now the Argives break
Their camp for sailing!

HECUBA.

Ah, not Cassandra! Wake not her
Whom God hath maddened, lest the foe
Mock at her dreaming. Leave me clear
From that one edge of woe.
O Troy, my Troy, thou diest here
Most lonely; and most lonely we
The living wander forth from thee,
And the dead leave thee wailing!

[*One of the huts on the left is now open, and the rest of the* CHORUS *come out severally. Their number eventually amounts to fifteen.*

FOURTH WOMAN.

[*Antistrophe* 1.

Out of the tent of the Greek king
I steal, my Queen, with trembling breath:
What means thy call? Not death; not death!
They would not slay so low a thing!

FIFTH WOMAN.

O, 'tis the ship-folk crying
To deck the galleys: and we part, we part!

HECUBA.

Nay, daughter: take the morning to thine heart.

FIFTH WOMAN.

My heart with dread is dying!

SIXTH WOMAN.

An herald from the Greek hath come!

FIFTH WOMAN.

How have they cast me, and to whom
A bondmaid?

HECUBA. Peace, child: wait thy doom.
Our lots are near the trying.

FOURTH WOMAN.

Argos, belike, or Phthia shall it be,
Or some lone island of the tossing sea,
Far, far from Troy?

HECUBA.

And I the agèd, where go I,
A winter-frozen bee, a slave
Death-shapen, as the stones that lie
Hewn on a dead man's grave:
The children of mine enemy
To foster, or keep watch before
The threshold of a master's door,
I that was Queen in Troy!

A WOMAN TO ANOTHER.

[*Strophe* 2.

And thou, what tears can tell thy doom?

THE OTHER.

The shuttle still shall flit and change
Beneath my fingers, but the loom,
Sister, be strange.

ANOTHER (*wildly*).

Look, my dead child! My child, my love,
The last look. . . .

ANOTHER. Oh, there cometh worse.

A Greek's bed in the dark. . . .

ANOTHER. God curse

That night and all the powers thereof!

ANOTHER.

Or pitchers to and fro to bear
To some Pirênê on the hill,
Where the proud water craveth still
Its broken-hearted minister.

ANOTHER.

God guide me yet to Theseus' land,
The gentle land, the famed afar . . .

ANOTHER.

But not the hungry foam—Ah, never!—
Of fierce Eurotas, Helen's river,
To bow to Menelaus' hand,
That wasted Troy with war!

A WOMAN.

[*Antistrophe* 2.

They told us of a land high-born,
Where glimmers round Olympus' roots
A lordly river, red with corn
And burdened fruits.

ANOTHER.

Aye, that were next in my desire
To Athens, where good spirits dwell . . .

ANOTHER.

Or Aetna's breast, the deeps of fire
That front the Tyrian's Citadel:
First mother, she, of Sicily
And mighty mountains: fame hath told
Their crowns of goodness manifold. . . .

ANOTHER.

And, close beyond the narrowing sea,
A sister land, where float enchanted
Ionian summits, wave on wave,

And Crathis of the burning tresses
Makes red the happy vale, and blesses
With gold of fountains spirit-haunted
Homes of true men and brave!

LEADER.

But lo, who cometh: and his lips
Grave with the weight of dooms unknown:
A Herald from the Grecian ships.
Swift comes he, hot-foot to be done
And finished. Ah, what bringeth he
Of news or judgment? Slaves are we,
Spoils that the Greek hath won!
[TALTHYBIUS, *followed by some Soldiers, enters from the left.*

TALTHYBIUS.

Thou know'st me, Hecuba. Often have I crossed
Thy plain with tidings from the Hellene host.
'Tis I, Talthybius. . . . Nay, of ancient use
Thou know'st me. And I come to bear thee news.

HECUBA.

Ah me, 'tis here, 'tis here,
Women of Troy, our long embosomed fear!

TALTHYBIUS.

The lots are cast, if that it was ye feared.

HECUBA.

What lord, what land. . . . Ah me,
Phthia or Thebes, or sea-worn Thessaly?

TALTHYBIUS.

Each hath her own. Ye go not in one herd.

HECUBA.

Say then what lot hath any? What of joy
Falls, or can fall on any child of Troy?

TALTHYBIUS.

I know: but make thy questions severally.

HECUBA.

My stricken one must be
Still first. Say how Cassandra's portion lies.

TALTHYBIUS.

Chosen from all for Agamemnon's prize!

HECUBA.

How, for his Spartan bride
A tirewoman? For Helen's sister's pride?

TALTHYBIUS.

Nay, nay: a bride herself, for the King's bed.

HECUBA.

The sainted of Apollo? And her own
Prize that God promisèd
Out of the golden clouds, her virgin crown? . . .

TALTHYBIUS.

He loved her for that same strange holiness.

HECUBA.

Daughter, away, away,
Cast all away,
The haunted Keys, the lonely stole's array
That kept thy body like a sacred place!

TALTHYBIUS.

Is't not rare fortune that the King hath smiled
On such a maid?

HECUBA.

What of that other child
Ye reft from me but now?

TALTHYBIUS (*speaking with some constraint*).

Polyxena? Or what child meanest thou?

HECUBA.

The same. What man now hath her, or what doom?

TALTHYBIUS.

She rests apart, to watch Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA.

To watch a tomb? My daughter? What is this? . . .
Speak, Friend? What fashion of the laws of Greece?

TALTHYBIUS.

Count thy maid happy! She hath naught of ill
To fear . . .

HECUBA.

What meanest thou? She liveth still?

TALTHYBIUS.

I mean, she hath one toil that holds her free
From all toil else.

HECUBA.

What of Andromache,
Wife of mine iron-hearted Hector, where
Journeyeth she?

TALTHYBIUS.

Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, hath taken her.

HECUBA.

And I, whose slave am I,
The shaken head, the arm that creepeth by,
Staff-crutchèd, like to fall?

TALTHYBIUS.

Odysseus, Ithaca's king, hath thee for thrall.

HECUBA.

Beat, beat the crownless head:
Rend the cheek till the tears run red!
A lying man and a pitiless
Shall be lord of me, a heart full-flown
With scorn of righteousness:
O heart of a beast where law is none,
Where all things change so that lust be fed,
The oath and the deed, the right and the wrong,
Even the hate of the forkèd tongue:
Even the hate turns and is cold,
False as the love that was false of old!

O Women of Troy, weep for me!
Yea, I am gone: I am gone my ways.
Mine is the crown of misery,
The bitterest day of all our days.

LEADER.

Thy fate thou knowest, Queen: but I know not
What lord of South or North has won my lot.

TALTHYBIUS.

Go, seek Cassandra, men! Make your best speed,
That I may leave her with the King, and lead
These others to their divers lords. . . . Ha, there!
What means that sudden light? Is it the flare
Of torches?

[*Light is seen shining through the crevices of the second hut on the right. He moves towards it.*

Would they fire their prison rooms,
Or how, these dames of Troy?—'Fore God, the dooms
Are known, and now they burn themselves and die
Rather than sail with us! How savagely
In days like these a free neck chafes beneath
Its burden! . . . Open! Open quick! Such death
Were bliss to them, it may be: but 'twill bring
Much wrath, and leave me shamed before the King!

HECUBA.

There is no fire, no peril: 'tis my child,
Cassandra, by the breath of God made wild.

[*The door opens from within and* CASSANDRA *enters, white-robed and wreathed like a Priestess, a great torch in her hand. She is singing softly to herself and does not see the Herald or the scene before her.*

CASSANDRA.

Lift, lift it high: [*Strophe.*
Give it to mine hand!
Lo, I bear a flame
Unto God! I praise his name.
I light with a burning brand
This sanctuary.

Blessèd is he that shall wed,
And blessèd, blessèd am I
In Argos: a bride to lie
With a king in a king's bed.

Hail, O Hymen red,
O Torch that makest one!
Weepest thou, Mother mine own?
Surely thy cheek is pale
With tears, tears that wail
For a land and a father dead.
But I go garlanded:
I am the Bride of Desire:
Therefore my torch is borne—
Lo, the lifting of morn,
Lo, the leaping of fire!—

For thee, O Hymen bright,
For thee, O Moon of the Deep,
So Law hath charged, for the light
Of a maid's last sleep.

Awake, O my feet, awake: [*Antistrophe.*
Our father's hope is won!
Dance as the dancing skies
Over him, where he lies
Happy beneath the sun! . . .
Lo, the Ring that I make . . .
[*She makes a circle round her with a torch, and visions appear to her.*

Apollo! . . . Ah, is it thou?
O shrine in the laurels cold,
I bear thee still, as of old,
Mine incense! Be near to me now.
[*She waves the torch as though bearing incense.*

O Hymen, Hymen fleet:
  Quick torch that makest one! . . .
  How? Am I still alone?
Laugh as I laugh, and twine
In the dance, O Mother mine:
  Dear feet, be near my feet!

Come, greet ye Hymen, greet
  Hymen with songs of pride:
Sing to him loud and long,
Cry, cry, when the song
  Faileth, for joy of the bride!

O Damsels girt in the gold
  Of Ilion, cry, cry ye,
For him that is doomed of old
  To be lord of me!

LEADER.

O hold the damsel, lest her trancèd feet
Lift her afar, Queen, toward the Hellene fleet!

HECUBA.

O Fire, Fire, where men make marriages
Surely thou hast thy lot; but what are these
Thou bringest flashing? Torches savage-wild
And far from mine old dreams.—Alas, my child,
How little dreamed I then of wars or red
Spears of the Greek to lay thy bridal bed!
Give me thy brand; it hath no holy blaze
Thus in thy frenzy flung. Nor all thy days
Nor all thy griefs have changed them yet, nor learned
Wisdom.—Ye women, bear the pine half burned

To the chamber back; and let your drownèd eyes
Answer the music of these bridal cries!

[*She takes the torch and gives it to one of the women.*

CASSANDRA.

O Mother, fill mine hair with happy flowers,
And speed me forth. Yea, if my spirit cowers,
Drive me with wrath! So liveth Loxias,
A bloodier bride than ever Helen was
Go I to Agamemnon, Lord most high
Of Hellas! . . . I shall kill him, mother; I
Shall kill him, and lay waste his house with fire
As he laid ours. My brethren and my sire
Shall win again . . .
(*Checking herself*) But part I must let be,
And speak not. Not the axe that craveth me,
And more than me; not the dark wanderings
Of mother-murder that my bridal brings,
And all the House of Atreus down, down, down . . .

Nay, I will show thee. Even now this town
Is happier than the Greeks. I know the power
Of God is on me: but this little hour,
Wilt thou but listen, I will hold him back!
One love, one woman's beauty, o'er the track
Of hunted Helen, made their myriads fall.
And this their King so wise, who ruleth all,
What wrought he? Cast out Love that Hate might feed:
Gave to his brother his own child, his seed

Of gladness, that a woman fled, and fain
To fly for ever, should be turned again!
So the days waned, and armies on the shore
Of Simois stood and strove and died. Wherefore?
No man had moved their landmarks; none had shook
Their wallèd towns.—And they whom Ares took,
Had never seen their children: no wife came
With gentle arms to shroud the limbs of them
For burial, in a strange and angry earth
Laid dead. And there at home, the same long dearth:
Women that lonely died, and aged men
Waiting for sons that ne'er should turn again,
Nor know their graves, nor pour drink-offerings,
To still the unslakèd dust. These be the things
The conquering Greek hath won!
But we—what pride,
What praise of men were sweeter?—fighting died
To save our people. And when war was red
Around us, friends upbore the gentle dead
Home, and dear women's heads about them wound
White shrouds, and here they sleep in the old ground
Belovèd. And the rest long days fought on,
Dwelling with wives and children, not alone
And joyless, like these Greeks.
And Hector's woe,
What is it? He is gone, and all men know
His glory, and how true a heart he bore.
It is the gift the Greek hath brought! Of yore
Men saw him not, nor knew him. Yea, and even
Paris hath loved withal a child of heaven:

Else had his love but been as others are.
Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!
Therefore, O Mother, pity not thy slain,
Nor Troy, nor me, the bride. Thy direst foe
And mine by this my wooing is brought low.

TALTHYBIUS (*at last breaking through the spell that has held him*).

I swear, had not Apollo made thee mad,
Not lightly hadst thou flung this shower of bad
Bodings, to speed my General o'er the seas!
'Fore God, the wisdoms and the greatnesses
Of seeming, are they hollow all, as things
Of naught? This son of Atreus, of all kings
Most mighty, hath so bowed him to the love
Of this mad maid, and chooseth her above
All women! By the Gods, rude though I be,
I would not touch her hand!
Look thou; I see
Thy lips are blind, and whatso words they speak,
Praises of Troy or shamings of the Greek,
I cast to the four winds! Walk at my side
In peace! . . . And heaven content him of his bride!
[*He moves as though to go, but turns to* HECUBA, *and speaks more gently.*
And thou shalt follow to Odysseus' host
When the word comes. 'Tis a wise queen thou go'st
To serve, and gentle: so the Ithacans say.

CASSANDRA (*seeing for the first time the Herald and all the scene*).

How fierce a slave! . . . O Heralds, Heralds!
Yea,
Voices of Death; and mists are over them
Of dead men's anguish, like a diadem,
These weak abhorrèd things that serve the hate
Of kings and peoples! . . .
To Odysseus' gate
My mother goeth, say'st thou? Is God's word
As naught, to me in silence ministered,
That in this place she dies? . . . (*To herself*) No
more; no more!
Why should I speak the shame of them, before
They come? . . . Little he knows, that hard-beset
Spirit, what deeps of woe await him yet;
Till all these tears of ours and harrowings
Of Troy, by his, shall be as golden things.
Ten years behind ten years athwart his way
Waiting: and home, lost and unfriended . . .
Nay:
Why should Odysseus' labours vex my breath?
On; hasten; guide me to the house of Death,
To lie beside my bridegroom! . . .
Thou Greek King,
Who deem'st thy fortune now so high a thing,
Thou dust of the earth, a lowlier bed I see,
In darkness, not in light, awaiting thee:
And with thee, with thee . . . there, where yawneth
plain
A rift of the hills, raging with winter rain,

Dead . . . and out-cast . . . and naked . . . It is I
Beside my bridegroom: and the wild beasts cry,
And ravin on God's chosen!

[*She clasps her hands to her brow and feels the wreaths.*

O, ye wreaths!
Ye garlands of my God, whose love yet breathes
About me; shapes of joyance mystical;
Begone! I have forgot the festival,
Forgot the joy. Begone! I tear ye, so,
From off me! . . . Out on the swift winds they go.
With flesh still clean I give them back to thee,
Still white, O God, O light that leadest me!

[*Turning upon the Herald.*

Where lies the galley? Whither shall I tread?
See that your watch be set, your sail be spread.
The wind comes quick! . . . Three Powers—mark me, thou!—
There be in Hell, and one walks with thee now!
Mother, farewell, and weep not! O my sweet
City, my earth-clad brethren, and thou great
Sire that begat us; but a space, ye Dead,
And I am with you: yea, with crownèd head
I come, and shining from the fires that feed
On these that slay us now, and all their seed!

[*She goes out, followed by* TALTHYBIUS *and the Soldiers;* HECUBA, *after waiting for an instant motionless, falls to the ground.*

LEADER OF CHORUS.

The Queen, ye Watchers! See, she falls, she falls,
Rigid without a word! O sorry thralls,

Too late! And will ye leave her downstricken,
A woman, and so old? Raise her again!

[*Some women go to* HECUBA, *but she refuses their aid and speaks without rising.*

HECUBA.

Let lie . . . the love we seek not is no love . . .
This ruined body! Is the fall thereof
Too deep for all that now is over me
Of anguish, and hath been, and yet shall be?
Ye Gods . . . Alas! Why call on things so weak
For aid? Yet there is something that doth seek,
Crying, for God, when one of us hath woe.
O, I will think of things gone long ago
And weave them to a song, like one more tear
In the heart of misery. . . . All kings we were;
And I must wed a king. And sons I brought
My lord King, many sons . . . nay, that were naught;
But high strong princes, of all Troy the best.
Hellas nor Troäs nor the garnered East
Held such a mother! And all these things beneath
The Argive spear I saw cast down in death,
And shore these tresses at the dead men's feet.
Yea, and the gardener of my garden great,
It was not any noise of him nor tale
I wept for; these eyes saw him, when the pale
Was broke, and there at the altar Priam fell
Murdered, and round him all his citadel
Sacked. And my daughters, virgins of the fold,
Meet to be brides of mighty kings, behold,
'Twas for the Greek I bred them! All are gone;
And no hope left, that I shall look upon
Their faces any more, nor they on mine.

And now my feet tread on the utmost line:
An old, old slave-woman, I pass below
Mine enemies' gates; and whatso task they know
For this age basest, shall be mine; the door,
Bowing, to shut and open. . . . I that bore
Hector! . . . and meal to grind, and this racked head
Bend to the stones after a royal bed;
Torn rags about me, aye, and under them
Torn flesh; 'twill make a woman sick for shame!
Woe's me; and all that one man's arms might hold
One woman, what long seas have o'er me rolled
And roll for ever! . . . O my child, whose white
Soul laughed amid the laughter of God's light,
Cassandra, what hands and how strange a day
Have loosed thy zone! And thou, Polyxena,
Where art thou? And my sons? Not any seed
Of man nor woman now shall help my need.
Why raise me any more? What hope have I
To hold me? Take this slave that once trod high
In Ilion; cast her on her bed of clay
Rock-pillowed, to lie down, and pass away
Wasted with tears. And whatso man they call
Happy, believe not ere the last day fall!

CHORUS. [*Strophe.*

O Muse, be near me now, and make
A strange song for Ilion's sake,
Till a tone of tears be about mine ears
And out of my lips a music break
For Troy, Troy, and the end of the years:
When the wheels of the Greek above me pressed,
And the mighty horse-hoofs beat my breast;
And all around were the Argive spears

A towering Steed of golden rein—
O gold without, dark steel within!—
Ramped in our gates; and all the plain
Lay silent where the Greeks had been.
And a cry broke from all the folk
Gathered above on Ilion's rock:
"Up, up, O fear is over now!
To Pallas, who hath saved us living,
To Pallas bear this victory-vow!"
Then rose the old man from his room,
The merry damsel left her loom,
And each bound death about his brow
With minstrelsy and high thanksgiving!

[*Antistrophe.*

O, swift were all in Troy that day,
And girt them to the portal-way,
Marvelling at that mountain Thing
Smooth-carven, where the Argives lay,
And wrath, and Ilion's vanquishing:
Meet gift for her that spareth not,
Heaven's yokeless Rider. Up they brought
Through the steep gates her offering:
Like some dark ship that climbs the shore
On straining cables, up, where stood
Her marble throne, her hallowed floor,
Who lusted for her people's blood.

A very weariness of joy
Fell with the evening over Troy:
And lutes of Afric mingled there
With Phrygian songs: and many a maiden,
With white feet glancing light as air,

Made happy music through the gloom:
And fires on many an inward room
All night broad-flashing, flung their glare
On laughing eyes and slumber-laden.

A Maiden.

I was among the dancers there
To Artemis, and glorying sang
Her of the Hills, the Maid most fair,
Daughter of Zeus: and, lo, there rang
A shout out of the dark, and fell
Deathlike from street to street, and made
A silence in the citadel:
And a child cried, as if afraid,
And hid him in his mother's veil.
Then stalked the Slayer from his den,
The hand of Pallas served her well!
O blood, blood of Troy was deep
About the streets and altars then:
And in the wedded rooms of sleep,
Lo, the desolate dark alone,
And headless things, men stumbled on.

And forth, lo, the women go,
The crown of War, the crown of Woe,
To bear the children of the foe
And weep, weep, for Ilion!

[*As the song ceases a chariot is seen approaching from the town, laden with spoils. On it sits a mourning Woman with a child in her arms.*

LEADER.

Lo, yonder on the heapèd crest
Of a Greek wain, Andromachê,
As one that o'er an unknown sea
Tosseth; and on her wave-borne breast
Her loved one clingeth, Hector's child,
Astyanax . . . O most forlorn
Of women, whither go'st thou, borne
'Mid Hector's bronzen arms, and piled
Spoils of the dead, and pageantry
Of them that hunted Ilion down?
Aye, richly thy new lord shall crown
The mountain shrines of Thessaly!

ANDROMACHE. [*Strophe* 1.

Forth to the Greek I go,
Driven as a beast is driven.
HEC. Woe, woe!
AND. Nay, mine is woe:
Woe to none other given,
And the song and the crown therefor!
HEC. O Zeus!
AND. He hates thee sore!
HEC. Children!
AND. No more, no more
To aid thee: their strife is striven!

HECUBA. [*Antistrophe* 1.

Troy, Troy is gone!
AND. Yea, and her treasure parted.
HEC. Gone, gone, mine own
Children, the noble-hearted!

AND. Sing sorrow. . . .
HEC. For me, for me!
AND. Sing for the Great City,
That falleth, falleth to be
A shadow, a fire departed.

ANDROMACHE. [*Strophe* 2.

Come to me, O my lover!
HEC. The dark shroudeth him over,
My flesh, woman, not thine, not thine!
AND. Make of thine arms my cover!

HECUBA. [*Antistrophe* 2.

O thou whose wound was deepest,
Thou that my children keepest,
Priam, Priam, O age-worn King,
Gather me where thou sleepest.

ANDROMACHE (*her hands upon her heart*). [*Strophe* 3.

O here is the deep of desire,
HEC. (How? And is this not woe?)
AND. For a city burned with fire;
HEC. (It beateth, blow on blow.)
AND. God's wrath for Paris, thy son, that he died not long ago:

Who sold for his evil love
Troy and the towers thereof:
Therefore the dead men lie
Naked, beneath the eye

Of Pallas, and vultures croak
And flap for joy:
So Love hath laid his yoke
On the neck of Troy!

HECUBA.

[*Antistrophe* 3.

O mine own land, my home,
AND. (I weep for thee, left forlorn,)
HEC. See'st thou what end is come?
AND. (And the house where my babes were born.)
HEC. A desolate Mother we leave, O children, a City of scorn:

Even as the sound of a song
Left by the way, but long
Remembered, a tune of tears
Falling where no man hears,
In the old house, as rain,
For things loved of yore:
But the dead hath lost his pain
And weeps no more.

LEADER.

How sweet are tears to them in bitter stress,
And sorrow, and all the songs of heaviness.

ANDROMACHE.

Mother of him of old, whose mighty spear
Smote Greeks like chaff, see'st thou what things are here?

HECUBA.

I see God's hand, that buildeth a great crown
For littleness, and hath cast the mighty down.

ANDROMACHE.

I and my babe are driven among the droves
Of plundered cattle. O, when fortune moves
So swift, the high heart like a slave beats low.

HECUBA.

'Tis fearful to be helpless. Men but now
Have taken Cassandra, and I strove in vain.

ANDROMACHE.

Ah, woe is me; hath Ajax come again?
But other evil yet is at thy gate.

HECUBA.

Nay, Daughter, beyond number, beyond weight
My evils are! Doom raceth against doom.

ANDROMACHE.

Polyxena across Achilles' tomb
Lies slain, a gift flung to the dreamless dead.

HECUBA.

My sorrow! . . . 'Tis but what Talthybius said:
So plain a riddle, and I read it not.

ANDROMACHE.

I saw her lie, and stayed this chariot;
And raiment wrapt on her dead limbs, and beat
My breast for her.

HECUBA (*to herself*).

O the foul sin of it!
The wickedness! My child. My child! Again
I cry to thee. How cruelly art thou slain!

ANDROMACHE.

She hath died her death, and howso dark it be,
Her death is sweeter than my misery.

HECUBA.

Death cannot be what Life is, Child; the cup
Of Death is empty, and Life hath always hope.

ANDROMACHE.

O Mother, having ears, hear thou this word
Fear-conquering, till thy heart as mine be stirred
With joy. To die is only not to be;
And better to be dead than grievously
Living. They have no pain, they ponder not
Their own wrong. But the living that is brought
From joy to heaviness, his soul doth roam,
As in a desert, lost, from its old home.
Thy daughter lieth now as one unborn,
Dead, and naught knowing of the lust and scorn
That slew her. And I . . . long since I drew my bow
Straight at the heart of good fame; and I know
My shaft hit; and for that am I the more
Fallen from peace. All that men praise us for,
I loved for Hector's sake, and sought to win.
I knew that alway, be there hurt therein
Or utter innocence, to roam abroad
Hath ill report for women; so I trod
Down the desire thereof, and walked my way
In mine own garden. And light words and gay

Parley of women never passed my door.
The thoughts of mine own heart . . . I craved no more . . .
Spoke with me, and I was happy. Constantly
I brought fair silence and a tranquil eye
For Hector's greeting, and watched well the way
Of living, where to guide and where obey.
And, lo! some rumour of this peace, being gone
Forth to the Greek, hath cursed me. Achilles' son,
So soon as I was taken, for his thrall
Chose me. I shall do service in the hall
Of them that slew . . . How? Shall I thrust aside
Hector's belovèd face, and open wide
My heart to this new lord? Oh, I should stand
A traitor to the dead! And if my hand
And flesh shrink from him . . . lo, wrath and despite
O'er all the house, and I a slave!
One night,
One night . . . aye, men have said it . . . maketh tame
A woman in a man's arms. . . . O shame, shame!
What woman's lips can so forswear her dead,
And give strange kisses in another's bed?
Why, not a dumb beast, not a colt will run
In the yoke untroubled, when her mate is gone—
A thing not in God's image, dull, unmoved
Of reason. O my Hector! best beloved,
That, being mine, wast all in all to me,
My prince, my wise one, O my majesty
Of valiance! No man's touch had ever come
Near me, when thou from out my father's home
Didst lead me and make me thine. . . . And thou art dead,
And I war-flung to slavery and the bread

Of shame in Hellas, over bitter seas!
What knoweth she of evils like to these,
That dead Polyxena, thou weepest for?
There liveth not in my life any more
The hope that others have. Nor will I tell
The lie to mine own heart, that aught is well
Or shall be well. . . . Yet, O, to dream were sweet!

LEADER.

Thy feet have trod the pathway of my feet,
And thy clear sorrow teacheth me mine own.

HECUBA.

Lo, yonder ships: I ne'er set foot on one,
But tales and pictures tell, when over them
Breaketh a storm not all too strong to stem,
Each man strives hard, the tiller gripped, the mast
Manned, the hull baled, to face it: till at last
Too strong breaks the o'erwhelming sea: lo, then
They cease, and yield them up as broken men
To fate and the wild waters. Even so
I in my many sorrows bear me low,
Nor curse, nor strive that other things may be.
The great wave rolled from God hath conquered me.
But, O, let Hector and the fates that fell
On Hector, sleep. Weep for him ne'er so well,
Thy weeping shall not wake him. Honour thou
The new lord that is set above thee now,
And make of thine own gentle piety
A prize to lure his heart. So shalt thou be
A strength to them that love us, and—God knows,
It may be—rear this babe among his foes,

My Hector's child, to manhood and great aid
For Ilion. So her stones may yet be laid
One on another, if God will, and wrought
Again to a city! Ah, how thought to thought
Still beckons! . . . But what minion of the Greek
Is this that cometh, with new words to speak?

[*Enter* TALTHYBIUS *with a band of Soldiers. He comes forward slowly and with evident disquiet.*

TALTHYBIUS.

Spouse of the noblest heart that beat in Troy,
Andromache, hate me not! 'Tis not in joy
I tell thee. But the people and the Kings
Have with one voice . . .

ANDROMACHE.

What is it? Evil things
Are on thy lips!

TALTHYBIUS.

'Tis ordered, this child . . . Oh,
How can I tell her of it?

ANDROMACHE.

Doth he not go
With me, to the same master?

TALTHYBIUS.

There is none
In Greece, shall e'er be master of thy son.

ANDROMACHE.

How? Will they leave him here to build again
The wreck? . . .

TALTHYBIUS.

I know not how to tell thee plain!

ANDROMACHE.

Thou hast a gentle heart . . . if it be ill,
And not good, news thou hidest!

TALTHYBIUS.

'Tis their will
Thy son shall die. . . . The whole vile thing is said
Now!

ANDROMACHE.

Oh, I could have borne mine enemy's bed!

TALTHYBIUS.

And speaking in the council of the host
Odysseus hath prevailed—

ANDROMACHE.

O lost! lost! lost! . . .
Forgive me! It is not easy . . .

TALTHYBIUS.

. . . That the son
Of one so perilous be not fostered on
To manhood—

ANDROMACHE.

God; may his own counsel fall
On his own sons!

TALTHYBIUS.

. . . But from this crested wall
Of Troy be dashed, and die. . . . Nay, let the thing
Be done. Thou shalt be wiser so. Nor cling
So fiercely to him. Suffer as a brave
Woman in bitter pain; nor think to have
Strength which thou hast not. Look about thee here!
Canst thou see help, or refuge anywhere?
Thy land is fallen and thy lord, and thou
A prisoner and alone, one woman; how
Canst battle against us? For thine own good
I would not have thee strive, nor make ill blood
And shame about thee. . . . Ah, nor move thy lips
In silence there, to cast upon the ships
Thy curse! One word of evil to the host,
This babe shall have no burial, but be tossed
Naked. . . . Ah, peace! And bear as best thou may,
War's fortune. So thou shalt not go thy way
Leaving this child unburied; nor the Greek
Be stern against thee, if thy heart be meek!

ANDROMACHE (*to the child*).

Go, die, my best-beloved, my cherished one,
In fierce men's hands, leaving me here alone.
Thy father was too valiant; that is why
They slay thee! Other children, like to die,
Might have been spared for that. But on thy head
His good is turned to evil.
O thou bed
And bridal; O the joining of the hand,
That led me long ago to Hector's land

To bear, O not a lamb for Grecian swords
To slaughter, but a Prince o'er all the hordes
Enthroned of wide-flung Asia. . . . Weepest thou?
Nay, why, my little one? Thou canst not know.
And Father will not come; he will not come;
Not once, the great spear flashing, and the tomb
Riven to set thee free! Not one of all
His brethren, nor the might of Ilion's wall.
How shall it be? One horrible spring . . . deep, deep
Down. And thy neck . . . Ah God, so cometh sleep! . . .
And none to pity thee! . . . Thou little thing
That curlest in my arms, what sweet scents cling
All round thy neck! Belovèd; can it be
All nothing, that this bosom cradled thee
And fostered; all the weary nights, wherethrough
I watched upon thy sickness, till I grew
Wasted with watching? Kiss me. This one time;
Not ever again. Put up thine arms, and climb
About my neck: now, kiss me, lips to lips. . . .
O, ye have found an anguish that outstrips
All tortures of the East, ye gentle Greeks!
Why will ye slay this innocent, that seeks
No wrong? . . . O Helen, Helen, thou ill tree
That Tyndareus planted, who shall deem of thee
As child of Zeus? O, thou hast drawn thy breath
From many fathers, Madness, Hate, red Death,
And every rotting poison of the sky!
Zeus knows thee not, thou vampire, draining dry.
Greece and the world! God hate thee and destroy,
That with those beautiful eyes hast blasted Troy,
And made the far-famed plains a waste withal.

Quick! take him: drag him: cast him from the wall,
If cast ye will! Tear him, ye beasts, be swift!
God hath undone me, and I cannot lift
One hand, one hand, to save my child from death . . .
O, hide my head for shame: fling me beneath
Your galleys' benches! . . .

[*She swoons: then half-rising.*

Quick: I must begone
To the bridal. . . . I have lost my child, my own!

[*The Soldiers close round her.*

LEADER.

O Troy ill-starred; for one strange woman, one
Abhorrèd kiss, how are thine hosts undone!

TALTHYBIUS (*bending over* ANDROMACHE *and gradually taking the Child from her*).

Come, Child: let be that clasp of love
Outwearied! Walk thy ways with me,
Up to the crested tower, above
Thy father's wall . . . Where they decree
Thy soul shall perish.—Hold him: hold!—
Would God some other man might ply
These charges, one of duller mould,
And nearer to the iron than I!

HECUBA.

O Child, they rob us of our own,
Child of my Mighty One outworn:
Ours, ours thou art!—Can aught be done
Of deeds, can aught of pain be borne,

To aid thee?—Lo, this beaten head,
This bleeding bosom! These I spread
As gifts to thee. I can thus much.
Woe, woe for Troy, and woe for thee!
What fall yet lacketh, ere we touch
The last dead deep of misery?

[*The Child, who has started back from* TALTHYBIUS, *is taken up by one of the Soldiers and borne back towards the city, while* ANDROMACHE *is set again on the Chariot and driven off towards the ships.* TALTHYBIUS *goes with the Child.*

CHORUS.

[*Strophe* 1.

In Salamis, filled with the foaming
Of billows and murmur of bees,
Old Telamon stayed from his roaming,
Long ago, on a throne of the seas;
Looking out on the hills olive-laden,
Enchanted, where first from the earth
The grey-gleaming fruit of the Maiden
Athena had birth;
A soft grey crown for a city
Belovèd, a City of Light:
Yet he rested not there, nor had pity,
But went forth in his might,
Where Heracles wandered, the lonely
Bow-bearer, and lent him his hands
For the wrecking of one land only,
Of Ilion, Ilion only,
Most hated of lands!

[*Antistrophe* 1.

Of the bravest of Hellas he made him
A ship-folk, in wrath for the Steeds,
And sailed the wide waters, and stayed him
At last amid Simoïs' reeds;
And the oars beat slow in the river,
And the long ropes held in the strand,
And he felt for his bow and his quiver,
The wrath of his hand.
And the old king died; and the towers
That Phœbus had builded did fall,
And his wrath, as a flame that devours,
Ran red over all;
And the fields and the woodlands lay blasted,
Long ago. Yea, twice hath the Sire
Uplifted his hand and downcast it
On the wall of the Dardan, downcast it
As a sword and as fire.

[*Strophe* 2.

In vain, all in vain,
O thou 'mid the wine-jars golden
That movest in delicate joy,
Ganymêdês, child of Troy,
The lips of the Highest drain
The cup in thine hand upholden:
And thy mother, thy mother that bore thee,
Is wasted with fire and torn;
And the voice of her shores is heard,
Wild, as the voice of a bird,
For lovers and children before thee
Crying, and mothers outworn.
And the pools of thy bathing are perished,
And the wind-strewn ways of thy feet:

Yet thy face as aforetime is cherished
Of Zeus, and the breath of it sweet;
Yea, the beauty of Calm is upon it
In houses at rest and afar.
But thy land, He hath wrecked and o'erthrown it
In the wailing of war.

[*Antistrophe* 2.

O Love, ancient Love,
Of old to the Dardan given;
Love of the Lords of the Sky;
How didst thou lift us high
In Ilion, yea, and above
All cities, as wed with heaven!
For Zeus—O leave it unspoken:
But alas for the love of the Morn;
Morn of the milk-white wing,
The gentle, the earth-loving,
That shineth on battlements broken
In Troy, and a people forlorn!
And, lo, in her bowers Tithônus,
Our brother, yet sleeps as of old:
O, she too hath loved us and known us,
And the Steeds of her star, flashing gold,
Stooped hither and bore him above us;
Then blessed we the Gods in our joy.
But all that made them to love us
Hath perished from Troy.

[*As the song ceases, the King* MENELAUS *enters, richly armed and followed by a bodyguard of Soldiers. He is a prey to violent and conflicting emotions.*

MENELAUS.

How bright the face of heaven, and how sweet
The air this day, that layeth at my feet
The woman that I . . . Nay: 'twas not for her
I came. 'Twas for the man, the cozener
And thief, that ate with me and stole away
My bride. But Paris lieth, this long day,
By God's grace, under the horse-hoofs of the Greek,
And round him all his land. And now I seek . . .
Curse her! I scarce can speak the name she bears,
That was my wife. Here with the prisoners
They keep her, in these huts, among the hordes
Of numbered slaves.—The host whose labouring swords
Won her, have given her up to me, to fill
My pleasure; perchance kill her, or not kill,
But lead her home.—Methinks I have foregone
The slaying of Helen here in Ilion . . .
Over the long seas I will bear her back,
And there, there, cast her out to whatso wrack
Of angry death they may devise, who know
Their dearest dead for her in Ilion.—Ho!
Ye soldiers! Up into the chambers where
She croucheth! Grip the long blood-reeking hair,
And drag her to mine eyes . . . [*Controlling himself.*
And when there come
Fair breezes, my long ships shall bear her home.

[*The Soldiers go to force open the door of the second hut on the left.*

HECUBA.

Thou deep Base of the World, and thou high Throne
Above the World, whoe'er thou art, unknown

And hard of surmise, Chain of Things that be,
Or Reason of our Reason; God, to thee
I lift my praise, seeing the silent road
That bringeth justice ere the end be trod
To all that breathes and dies.

MENELAUS (*turning*).

Ha! who is there
That prayeth heaven, and in so strange a prayer?

HECUBA.

I bless thee, Menelaus, I bless thee,
If thou wilt slay her! Only fear to see
Her visage, lest she snare thee and thou fall!
She snareth strong men's eyes; she snareth tall
Cities; and fire from out her eateth up
Houses. Such magic hath she, as a cup
Of death! . . . Do I not know her? Yea, and thou,
And these that lie around, do they not know?

[*The Soldiers return from the hut and stand aside to let* HELEN *pass between them. She comes through them, gentle and unafraid; there is no disorder in her raiment.*

HELEN.

King Menelaus, thy first deed might make
A woman fear. Into my chamber brake
Thine armèd men, and lead me wrathfully.
Methinks, almost, I know thou hatest me.
Yet I would ask thee, what decree is gone
Forth for my life or death?

MENELAUS (*struggling with his emotion*).

There was not one

That scrupled for thee. All, all with one will
Gave thee to me, whom thou hast wronged, to kill!

HELEN.

And is it granted that I speak, or no,
In answer to them ere I die, to show
I die most wronged and innocent?

MENELAUS.

I seek
To kill thee, woman; not to hear thee speak!

HECUBA.

O hear her! She must never die unheard,
King Menelaus! And give me the word
To speak in answer! All the wrong she wrought
Away from thee, in Troy, thou knowest not.
The whole tale set together is a death
Too sure; she shall not 'scape thee!

MENELAUS.

'Tis but breath
And time. For thy sake, Hecuba, if she need
To speak, I grant the prayer. I have no heed
Nor mercy—let her know it well—for her!

HELEN.

It may be that, how false or true soe'er
Thou deem me, I shall win no word from thee.
So sore thou holdest me thine enemy.
Yet I will take what words I think thy heart
Holdeth of anger: and in even part
Set my wrong and thy wrong, and all that fell.
[*Pointing to* HECUBA.

S h e cometh first, who bare the seed and well
Of springing sorrow, when to life she brought
Paris: and that old King, who quenchèd not
Quick in the spark, ere yet he woke to slay,
The firebrand's image.—But enough: a day
Came, and this Paris judged beneath the trees
Three Crowns of Life, three diverse Goddesses.
The gift of Pallas was of War, to lead
His East in conquering battles, and make bleed
The hearths of Hellas. Hera held a Throne—
If majesties he craved—to reign alone
From Phrygia to the last realm of the West.
And Cypris, if he deemed her loveliest,
Beyond all heaven, made dreams about my face
And for her grace gave me. And, lo! her grace
Was judged the fairest, and she stood above
Those twain.—Thus was I loved, and thus my love
Hath holpen Hellas. No fierce Eastern crown
Is o'er your lands, no spear hath cast them down.
O, it was well for Hellas! But for me
Most ill; caught up and sold across the sea
For this my beauty; yea, dishonourèd
For that which else had been about my head
A crown of honour. . . . Ah, I see thy thought;
The first plain deed, 'tis that I answer not,
How in the dark out of thy house I fled . . .
There came the Seed of Fire, this woman's seed;
Came—O, a Goddess great walked with him then—
This Alexander, Breaker-down-of-Men,
This Paris, Strength-is-with-him; whom thou, whom—
O false and light of heart—thou in thy room

Didst leave, and spreadest sail for Cretan seas,
Far, far from me! . . . And yet, how strange it is!
I ask not thee; I ask my own sad thought,
What was there in my heart, that I forgot
My home and land and all I loved, to fly
With a strange man? Surely it was not I,
But Cypris, there! Lay thou thy rod on her,
And be more high than Zeus and bitterer,
Who o'er all other spirits hath his throne,
But knows her chain must bind him. My wrong done
Hath its own pardon. . . .
One word yet thou hast,
Methinks, of righteous seeming. When at last
The earth for Paris oped and all was o'er,
And her strange magic bound my feet no more,
Why kept I still his house, why fled not I
To the Argive ships? . . . Ah, how I strove to fly!
The old Gate-Warden could have told thee all,
My husband, and the watchers from the wall;
It was not once they took me, with the rope
Tied, and this body swung in the air, to grope
Its way toward t h e e, from that dim battlement.
Ah, husband still, how shall thy hand be bent
To slay me? Nay, if Right be come at last,
What shalt thou bring but comfort for pains past,
And harbour for a woman storm-driven:
A woman borne away by violent men:
And this one birthright of my beauty, this
That might have been my glory, lo, it is
A stamp that God hath burned, of slavery!
Alas! and if thou cravest still to be
As one set above gods, inviolate,
'Tis but a fruitless longing holds thee yet.

LEADER.

O Queen, think of thy children and thy land,
And break her spell! The sweet soft speech, the hand
And heart so fell: it maketh me afraid.

HECUBA.

Meseems her goddesses first cry mine aid
Against these lying lips! . . . Not Hera, nay,
Nor virgin Pallas deem I such low clay,
To barter their own folk, Argos and brave
Athens, to be trod down, the Phrygian's slave,
All for vain glory and a shepherd's prize
On Ida! Wherefore should great Hera's eyes
So hunger to be fair? She doth not use
To seek for other loves, being wed with Zeus.
And maiden Pallas . . . did some strange god's face
Beguile her, that she craved for loveliness,
Who chose from God one virgin gift above
All gifts, and fleëth from the lips of love?
Ah, deck not out thine own heart's evil springs
By making spirits of heaven as brutish things
And cruel. The wise may hear thee, and guess all!
And Cypris must take ship—fantastical!
Sail with my son and enter at the gate
To seek thee! Had she willed it, she had sate
At peace in heaven, and wafted thee, and all
Amyclae with thee, under Ilion's wall.
My son was passing beautiful, beyond
His peers; and thine own heart, that saw and conned
His face, became a spirit enchanting thee.
For all wild things that in mortality

Have being, are Aphroditê; and the name
She bears in heaven is born and writ of them.
  Thou sawest him in gold and orient vest
Shining, and lo, a fire about thy breast
Leapt! Thou hadst fed upon such little things,
Pacing thy ways in Argos. But now wings
Were come! Once free from Sparta, and there rolled
The Ilian glory, like broad streams of gold,
To steep thine arms and splash the towers! How
    small,
How cold that day was Menelaus' hall!
  Enough of that. It was by force my son
Took thee, thou sayst, and striving. . . . Yet not one
In Sparta knew! No cry, no sudden prayer
Rang from thy rooms that night. . . . Castor was there
To hear thee, and his brother: both true men,
Not yet among the stars! And after, when
Thou camest here to Troy, and in thy track
Argos and all its anguish and the rack
Of war—Ah God!—perchance men told thee 'Now
The Greek prevails in battle': then wouldst thou
Praise Menelaus, that my son might smart,
Striving with that old image in a heart
Uncertain still. Then Troy had victories:
And this Greek was as naught! Alway thine eyes
Watched Fortune's eyes, to follow hot where she
Led first. Thou wouldst not follow Honesty.
  Thy secret ropes, thy body swung to fall
Far, like a desperate prisoner, from the wall!
Who found thee so? When wast thou taken? Nay,
Hadst thou no surer rope, no sudden way
Of the sword, that any woman honest-souled
Had sought long since, loving her lord of old?

Often and often did I charge thee; 'Go,
My daughter; go thy ways. My sons will know
New loves. I will give aid, and steal thee past
The Argive watch. O give us peace at last,
Us and our foes!' But out thy spirit cried
As at a bitter word. Thou hadst thy pride
In Alexander's house, and O, 'twas sweet
To hold proud Easterns bowing at thy feet.
They were great things to thee! . . . And comest thou now
Forth, and hast decked thy bosom and thy brow,
And breathest with thy lord the same blue air,
Thou evil heart? Low, low, with ravaged hair,
Rent raiment, and flesh shuddering, and within—
O shame at last, not glory for thy sin;
So face him if thou canst! . . . Lo, I have done.
Be true, O King; let Hellas bear her crown
Of Justice. Slay this woman, and upraise
The law for evermore: she that betrays
Her husband's bed, let her be judged and die.

LEADER.

Be strong, O King; give judgment worthily
For thee and thy great house. Shake off thy long
Reproach; not weak, but iron against the wrong!

MENELAUS.

Thy thought doth walk with mine in one intent.
'Tis sure; her heart was willing, when she went
Forth to a stranger's bed. And all her fair
Tale of enchantment, 'tis a thing of air! . . .

[*Turning furiously upon* HELEN.

Out, woman! There be those that seek thee yet
With stones! Go, meet them. So shall thy long debt
Be paid at last. And ere this night is o'er
Thy dead face shall dishonour me no more!

HELEN (*kneeling before him and embracing him*).

Behold, mine arms are wreathed about thy knees;
Lay not upon my head the phantasies
Of Heaven. Remember all, and slay me not!

HECUBA.

Remember them she murdered, them that fought
Beside thee, and their children! Hear that prayer!

MENELAUS.

Peace, agèd woman, peace! 'Tis not for her;
She is as naught to me.
(*To the Soldiers*) . . . March on before,
Ye ministers, and tend her to the shore . . .
And have some chambered galley set for her,
Where she may sail the seas.

HECUBA.

If thou be there,
I charge thee, let not her set foot therein!

MENELAUS.

How? Shall the ship go heavier for her sin?

HECUBA.

A lover once, will alway love again.

MENELAUS.

If that he loved be evil, he will fain
Hate it! . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be done.
Some other ship shall bear her, not mine own. . . .
Thou counsellest very well . . . And when we come
To Argos, then . . . O then some pitiless doom
Well-earned, black as her heart! One that shall bind
Once for all time the law on womankind
Of faithfulness! . . . 'Twill be no easy thing,
God knoweth. But the thought thereof shall fling
A chill on the dreams of women, though they be
Wilder of wing and loathèd more than she!

[*Exit, following* HELEN, *who is escorted by the Soldiers.*

CHORUS.

Some Women.

[*Strophe* 1.

And hast thou turned from the Altar of frankincense,
And given to the Greek thy temple of Ilion?
The flame of the cakes of corn, is it gone from hence,
The myrrh on the air and the wreathèd towers gone?
And Ida, dark Ida, where the wild ivy grows,
The glens that run as rivers from the summer-broken snows,
And the Rock, is it forgotten, where the first sunbeam glows,
The lit house most holy of the Dawn?

Others.

[*Antistrophe* 1.

The sacrifice is gone and the sound of joy,
The dancing under the stars and the night-long prayer:
The Golden Images and the Moons of Troy,
The twelve Moons and the mighty names they bear:
My heart, my heart crieth, O Lord Zeus on high,
Were they all to thee as nothing, thou thronèd in the sky,
Thronèd in the fire-cloud, where a City, near to die,
Passeth in the wind and the flare?

A Woman.

[*Strophe* 2.

Dear one, O husband mine,
Thou in the dim dominions
Driftest with waterless lips,
Unburied; and me the ships
Shall bear o'er the bitter brine,
Storm-birds upon angry pinions,
Where the towers of the Giants shine
O'er Argos cloudily,
And the riders ride by the sea.

Others.

And children still in the Gate
Crowd and cry,
A multitude desolate,
Voices that float and wait
As the tears run dry:

'Mother, alone on the shore
They drive me, far from thee:
Lo, the dip of the oar,
The black hull on the sea!
Is it the Isle Immortal,
Salamis, waits for me?
Is it the Rock that broods
Over the sundered floods
Of Corinth, the ancient portal
Of Pelops' sovranty?'

A Woman.

[*Antistrophe* 2.

Out in the waste of foam,
Where rideth dark Menelaus,
Come to us there, O white
And jagged, with wild sea-light
And crashing of oar-blades, come,
O thunder of God, and slay us:
While our tears are wet for home,
While out in the storm go we,
Slaves of our enemy!

Others.

And, God, may Helen be there,
With mirror of gold,
Decking her face so fair,
Girl-like; and hear, and stare,
And turn death-cold:
Never, ah, never more
The hearth of her home to see,
Nor sand of the Spartan shore,
Nor tombs where her fathers be,

Nor Athena's bronzen Dwelling,
Nor the towers of Pitanê;
For her face was a dark desire
Upon Greece, and shame like fire,
And her dead are welling, welling,
From red Simoïs to the sea!

[TALTHYBIUS, *followed by one or two Soldiers and bearing the child* ASTYANAX *dead, is seen approaching.*

LEADER.

Ah, change on change! Yet each one racks
This land with evil manifold;
Unhappy wives of Troy, behold,
They bear the dead Astyanax,
Our prince, whom bitter Greeks this hour
Have hurled to death from Ilion's tower.

TALTHYBIUS.

One galley, Hecuba, there lingereth yet,
Lapping the wave, to gather the last freight
Of Pyrrhus' spoils for Thessaly. The chief
Himself long since hath parted, much in grief
For Pêleus' sake, his grandsire, whom, men say,
Acastus, Pelias' son, in war array
Hath driven to exile. Loath enough before
Was he to linger, and now goes the more
In haste, bearing Andromache, his prize.
'Tis she hath charmed these tears into mine eyes,
Weeping her fatherland, as o'er the wave
She gazed, and speaking words to Hector's grave.

Howbeit, she prayed us that due rites be done
For burial of this babe, thine Hector's son,
That now from Ilion's tower is fallen and dead.
And, lo! this great bronze-fronted shield, the dread
Of many a Greek, that Hector held in fray,
O never in God's name—so did she pray—
Be this borne forth to hang in Pêleus' hall
Or that dark bridal chamber, that the wall
May hurt her eyes; but here, in Troy o'erthrown,
Instead of cedar wood and vaulted stone,
Be this her child's last house. . . . And in thine hands
She bade me lay him, to be swathed in bands
Of death and garments, such as rest to thee
In these thy fallen fortunes; seeing that she
Hath gone her ways, and, for her master's haste,
May no more fold the babe unto his rest.
Howbeit, so soon as he is garlanded
And robed, we will heap earth above his head
And lift our sails. . . . See all be swiftly done,
As thou art bidden. I have saved thee one
Labour. For as I passed Scamander's stream
Hard by, I let the waters run on him,
And cleansed his wounds.—See, I will go forth now
And break the hard earth for his grave: so thou
And I will haste together, to set free
Our oars at last to beat the homeward sea!

[*He goes out with his Soldiers, leaving the body of the Child in* HECUBA'S *arms.*

HECUBA.

Set the great orb of Hector's shield to lie
Here on the ground. 'Tis bitter that mine eye

Should see it. . . . O ye Argives, was your spear
Keen, and your hearts so low and cold, to fear
This babe? 'Twas a strange murder for brave men!
For fear this babe some day might raise again
His fallen land! Had ye so little pride?
While Hector fought, and thousands at his side,
Ye smote us, and we perished; and now, now,
When all are dead and Ilion lieth low,
Ye dread this innocent! I deem it not
Wisdom, that rage of fear that hath no thought. . . .
Ah, what a death hath found thee, little one!
Hadst thou but fallen fighting, hadst thou known
Strong youth and love and all the majesty
Of godlike kings, then had we spoken of thee
As of one blessèd . . . could in any wise
These days know blessedness. But now thine eyes
Have seen, thy lips have tasted, but thy soul
No knowledge had nor usage of the whole
Rich life that lapt thee round. . . . Poor little child!
Was it our ancient wall, the circuit piled
By loving Gods, so savagely hath rent
Thy curls, these little flowers innocent
That were thy mother's garden, where she laid
Her kisses; here, just where the bone-edge frayed
Grins white above—Ah heaven, I will not see!
Ye tender arms, the same dear mould have ye
As his; how from the shoulder loose ye drop
And weak! And dear proud lips, so full of hope
And closed for ever! What false words ye said
At daybreak, when he crept into my bed,
Called me kind names, and promised: 'Grandmother,
When thou art dead, I will cut close my hair

And lead out all the captains to ride by
Thy tomb.' Why didst thou cheat me so? 'Tis I,
Old, homeless, childless, that for thee must shed
Cold tears, so young, so miserably dead.
Dear God, the pattering welcomes of thy feet,
The nursing in my lap; and O, the sweet
Falling asleep together! All is gone.
How should a poet carve the funeral stone
To tell thy story true? 'There lieth here
A babe whom the Greeks feared, and in their fear
Slew him.' Aye, Greece will bless the tale it tells!
Child, they have left thee beggared of all else
In Hector's house; but one thing shalt thou keep,
This war-shield bronzen-barred, wherein to sleep.
Alas, thou guardian true of Hector's fair
Left arm, how art thou masterless! And there
I see his handgrip printed on thy hold;
And deep stains of the precious sweat, that rolled
In battle from the brows and beard of him,
Drop after drop, are writ about thy rim.
Go, bring them—such poor garments hazardous
As these days leave. God hath not granted us
Wherewith to make much pride. But all I can,
I give thee, Child of Troy.—O vain is man,
Who glorieth in his joy and hath no fears:
While to and fro the chances of the years
Dance like an idiot in the wind! And none
By any strength hath his own fortune won.

[*During these lines several Women are seen approaching with garlands and raiment in their hands.*

LEADER.

Lo these, who bear thee raiment harvested
From Ilion's slain, to fold upon the dead.

[*During the following scene* HECUBA *gradually takes the garments and wraps them about the Child.*

HECUBA.

O not in pride for speeding of the car
Beyond thy peers, not for the shaft of war
True aimed, as Phrygians use; not any prize
Of joy for thee, nor splendour in men's eyes,
Thy father's mother lays these offerings
About thee, from the many fragrant things
That were all thine of old. But now no more.
One woman, loathed of God, hath broke the door
And robbed thy treasure-house, and thy warm breath
Made cold, and trod thy people down to death!

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Deep in the heart of me
I feel thine hand,
Mother: and is it he
Dead here, our prince to be,
And lord of the land?

HECUBA.

Glory of Phrygian raiment, which my thought
Kept for thy bridal day with some far-sought
Queen of the East, folds thee for evermore.
And thou, grey Mother, Mother-Shield that bore

A thousand days of glory, thy last crown
Is here. . . . Dear Hector's shield! Thou shalt lie down
Undying with the dead, and lordlier there
Than all the gold Odysseus' breast can bear,
The evil and the strong!

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Child of the Shield-bearer,
Alas, Hector's child!
Great Earth, the All-mother,
Taketh thee unto her
With wailing wild!

Others.

Mother of misery,
Give Death his song!
(HEC. Woe!) Aye and bitterly
(HEC. Woe!) We too weep for thee,
And the infinite wrong!

[*During these lines* HECUBA, *kneeling by the body, has been performing a funeral rite, symbolically staunching the dead Child's wounds.*

HECUBA.

I make thee whole;
I bind thy wounds, O little vanished soul.
This wound and this I heal with linen white:
O emptiness of aid! . . . Yet let the rite
Be spoken. This and . . . Nay, not I, but he,
Thy father far away shall comfort thee!

[*She bows her head to the ground and remains motionless and unseeing.*

CHORUS.

Beat, beat thine head:
Beat with the wailing chime
Of hands lifted in time:
Beat and bleed for the dead.
Woe is me for the dead!

HECUBA.

O Women! Ye, mine own . . .

[*She rises bewildered, as though she had seen a vision.*

LEADER.

Hecuba, speak!
Thine are we all. Oh, ere thy bosom break . . .

HECUBA.

Lo, I have seen the open hand of God;
And in it nothing, nothing, save the rod
Of mine affliction, and the eternal hate,
Beyond all lands, chosen and lifted great
For Troy! Vain, vain were prayer and incense-swell
And bulls' blood on the altars! . . . All is well.
Had He not turned us in His hand, and thrust
Our high things low and shook our hills as dust,
We had not been this splendour, and our wrong
An everlasting music for the song
Of earth and heaven!
Go, women: lay our dead
In his low sepulchre. He hath his meed
Of robing. And, methinks, but little care
Toucheth the tomb, if they that moulder there

Have rich encerëment. 'Tis we, 'tis we,
That dream, we living and our vanity!

[*The Women bear out the dead Child upon the shield, singing, when presently flames of fire and dim forms are seen among the ruins of the City.*

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Woe for the mother that bare thee, child,
Thread so frail of a hope so high,
That Time hath broken: and all men smiled
About thy cradle, and, passing by,
Spoke of thy father's majesty.
Low, low, thou liest!

Others.

Ha! Who be these on the crested rock?
Fiery hands in the dusk, and a shock
Of torches flung! What lingereth still,
O wounded City, of unknown ill,
Ere yet thou diest?

TALTHYBIUS (*coming out through the ruined Wall*).

Ye Captains that have charge to wreck this keep
Of Priam's City, let your torches sleep
No more! Up, fling the fire into her heart!
Then have we done with Ilion, and may part
In joy to Hellas from this evil land.
And ye—so hath one word two faces—stand,

Daughters of Troy, till on your ruined wall
The echo of my master's trumpet call
In signal breaks: then, forward to the sea,
Where the long ships lie waiting.
And for thee,
O ancient woman most unfortunate,
Follow: Odysseus' men be here, and wait
To guide thee. . . . 'Tis to him thou go'st for thrall.

HECUBA.

Ah, me! and is it come, the end of all,
The very crest and summit of my days?
I go forth from my land, and all its ways
Are filled with fire! Bear me, O aged feet,
A little nearer: I must gaze, and greet
My poor town ere she fall.
Farewell, farewell!
O thou whose breath was mighty on the swell
Of orient winds, my Troy! Even thy name
Shall soon be taken from thee. Lo, the flame
Hath thee, and we, thy children, pass away
To slavery . . . God! O God of mercy! . . . Nay:
Why call I on the Gods? They know, they know,
My prayers, and would not hear them long ago.
Quick, to the flames! O, in thine agony,
My Troy, mine own, take me to die with thee!
[*She springs toward the flames, but is seized and held by the Soldiers.*

TALTHYBIUS.

Back! Thou art drunken with thy miseries,
Poor woman!—Hold her fast, men, till it please

Odysseus that she come. She was his lot
Chosen from all and portioned. Lose her not!
[*He goes to watch over the burning of the City.*
The dusk deepens.

CHORUS.

Divers Women.

Woe, woe, woe!
Thou of the Ages, O wherefore fleëst thou,
Lord of the Phrygian, Father that made us?
'Tis we, thy children; shall no man aid us?
'Tis we, thy children! Seëst thou, seëst thou?

Others.

He seëth, only his heart is pitiless;
And the land dies: yea, she,
She of the Mighty Cities perisheth citiless!
Troy shall no more be!

Others.

Woe, woe, woe!
Ilion shineth afar!
Fire in the deeps thereof,
Fire in the heights above,
And crested walls of War!

Others.

As smoke on the wing of heaven
Climbeth and scattereth,
Torn of the spear and driven,
The land crieth for death:
O stormy battlements that red fire hath riven,
And the sword's angry breath!
[*A new thought comes to* HECUBA; *she kneels and beats the earth with her hands.*

HECUBA.

[*Strophe.*

O Earth, Earth of my children; hearken! and O mine own,
Ye have hearts and forget not, ye in the darkness lying!

LEADER.

Now hast thou found thy prayer, crying to them that are gone.

HECUBA.

Surely my knees are weary, but I kneel above your head;
Hearken, O ye so silent! My hands beat your bed!

LEADER.

I, I am near thee;
I kneel to thy dead to hear thee,
Kneel to mine own in the darkness; O husband, hear my crying!

HECUBA.

Even as the beasts they drive, even as the loads they bear,

LEADER.

(Pain; O pain!)

HECUBA.

We go to the house of bondage. Hear, ye dead, O hear!

LEADER.

(Go, and come not again!)

HECUBA.

Priam, mine own Priam,
Lying so lowly,
Thou in thy nothingness,
Shelterless, comfortless,
See'st thou the thing I am?
Know'st thou my bitter stress?

LEADER.

Nay, thou art naught to him!
Out of the strife there came,
Out of the noise and shame,
Making his eyelids dim,
Death, the Most Holy!
[*The fire and smoke rise constantly higher.*

HECUBA.

[*Antistrophe.*

O high houses of Gods, belovèd streets of my birth,
Ye have found the way of the sword, the fiery and blood-red river!

LEADER.

Fall, and men shall forget you! Ye shall lie in the gentle earth.

HECUBA.

The dust as smoke riseth; it spreadeth wide its wing;
It maketh me as a shadow, and my City a vanished thing!

LEADER.

Out on the smoke she goeth,
And her name no man knoweth;
And the cloud is northward, southward; Troy is gone for ever!

[*A great crash is heard, and the Wall is lost in smoke and darkness.*

HECUBA.

Ha! Marked ye? Heard ye? The crash of the towers that fall!

LEADER.

All is gone!

HECUBA.

Wrath in the earth and quaking and a flood that sweepeth all,

LEADER.

And passeth on!

[*The Greek trumpet sounds.*

HECUBA.

Farewell!—O spirit grey,
Whatso is coming,
Fail not from under me.
Weak limbs, why tremble ye?
Forth where the new long day
Dawneth to slavery!

CHORUS.

Farewell from parting lips,
Farewell!—Come, I and thou,
Whatso may wait us now,
Forth to the long Greek ships
And the sea's foaming.

[*The trumpet sounds again, and the Women go out in the darkness.*

NOTES ON THE TROJAN WOMEN

P. 11, l. 5, Poseidon.]—In the *Iliad* Poseidon is the enemy of Troy, here the friend. This sort of confusion comes from the fact that the Trojans and their Greek enemies were largely of the same blood, with the same tribal gods. To the Trojans, Athena the War-Goddess was, of course, *their* War-Goddess, the protectress of their citadel. Poseidon, god of the sea and its merchandise, and Apollo (possibly a local shepherd god?), were their natural friends and had actually built their city wall for love of the good old king, Laomedon. Zeus, the great father, had Mount Ida for his holy hill and Troy for his peculiar city. (Cf. on p. 63.)

To suit the Greek point of view all this had to be changed or explained away. In the *Iliad* generally Athena is the proper War-Goddess of the Greeks. Poseidon had indeed built the wall for Laomedon, but Laomedon had cheated him of his reward—as afterwards he cheated Heracles, and the Argonauts and everybody else! So Poseidon hated Troy. Troy is chiefly defended by the barbarian Ares, the oriental Aphrodite, by its own rivers Scamander and Simoïs and suchlike inferior or unprincipled gods.

Yet traces of the other tradition remain. Homer knows that Athena is specially worshipped in Troy. He knows that Apollo, who had built the wall with Poseidon, and had the same experience of Laomedon, still loves the Trojans. Zeus himself, though eventually in obedience to destiny he permits the fall of the city, nevertheless has a great tenderness towards it.

P. 11, l. 11, A steed marvellous.]—See below, on p. 36.

P. 12, l. 25, I go forth from great Ilion, &c.]—The correct ancient doctrine. When your gods forsook you, there was no more hope. Conversely, when your state became desperate, evidently your gods were forsaking you. From another point of view, also, when the city was desolate and unable to worship its gods, the gods of that city were no more.

P. 12, l. 34, Laconian Tyndarid.]—Helen was the child of Zeus and Leda, and sister of Castor and Polydeuces; but her human father was Tyndareus, an old Spartan king. She is treated as "a prisoner and a prize," *i.e.,* as a captured enemy, not as a Greek princess delivered from the Trojans.

P. 12, l. 40, In secret slain.]—Because the Greeks were ashamed of the bloody deed. See below, p. 42, and the scene on this subject in the *Hecuba.*

P. 12, l. 42, Cassandra.]—In the *Agamemnon* the story is more clearly told, that Cassandra was loved by Apollo and endowed by him with the power of prophecy; then in some way she rejected or betrayed him, and he set upon her the curse that though seeing the truth she should never be believed. The figure of Cassandra in this play is not inconsistent with that version, but it makes a different impression. She is here a dedicated virgin, and her mystic love for Apollo does not seem to have suffered any breach.

P. 13, l. 47, Pallas.]—(See above.) The historical explanation of the Trojan Pallas and the Greek Pallas is simple enough; but as soon as the two are mythologically personified and made one, there emerges just such a bitter and ruthless goddess as Euripides, in his revolt against the current mythology, loved to depict. But it is not only the mythology that he is attacking. He seems really to feel that if there are conscious gods ruling the world, they are cruel or "inhuman" beings.

P. 15, l. 70.]—Ajax the Less, son of Oïleus, either ravished or attempted to ravish Cassandra (the story

occurs in both forms) while she was clinging to the Palladium or image of Pallas. It is one of the great typical sins of the Sack of Troy, often depicted on vases.

P. 17, l. 123, Faces of ships.]—Homeric ships had prows shaped and painted to look like birds' or beasts' heads. A ship was always a wonderfully live and vivid thing to the Greek poets. (Cf. p. 64.)

P. 18, l. 132, Castor.]—Helen's brother: the Eurôtas, the river of her home, Sparta.

P. 18, l. 135, Fifty seeds.]—Priam had fifty children, nineteen of them children of Hecuba (*Il.* vi. 451, &c.).

P. 22, l. 205, Pirene.]—The celebrated spring on the hill of Corinth. Drawing water was a typical employment of slaves.

P. 22, l. 219 ff., Theseus' land, &c.]—Theseus' land is Attica. The poet, in the midst of his bitterness over the present conduct of his city, clings the more to its old fame for humanity. The "land high-born" where the Penêüs flows round the base of Mount Olympus in northern Thessaly is one of the haunts of Euripides' dreams in many plays. Cf. *Bacchae,* 410 (p. 97 in my translation). Mount Aetna fronts the "Tyrians' citadel," *i.e.,* Carthage, built by the Phoenicians. The "sister land" is the district of Sybaris in South Italy, where the river Crathis has, or had, a red-gold colour, which makes golden the hair of men and the fleeces of sheep; and the water never lost its freshness.

P. 23, l. 235.]—Talthybius is a loyal soldier with every wish to be kind. But he is naturally in good spirits over the satisfactory end of the war, and his tact is not sufficient to enable him to understand the Trojan Women's feelings. Yet in the end, since he has to see and do the cruelties which his Chiefs only order from a distance, the real nature of his work forces itself upon him, and he feels and speaks at times almost like a Trojan. It is worth noticing how the Trojan Women generally avoid addressing him. (Cf. pp. 48, 67, 74.)

P. 24, l. 256, The haunted keys (literally, "with

God through them, penetrating them").]—Cassandra was his Key-bearer, holding the door of his Holy Place. (Cf. *Hip.* 540, p. 30.)

P. 25, l. 270, She hath a toil, &c.]—There is something true and pathetic about this curious blindness which prevents Hecuba from understanding "so plain a riddle." (Cf. below, p. 42.) She takes the watching of a Tomb to be some strange Greek custom, and does not seek to have it explained further.

P. 26, l. 277, Odysseus.]—In Euripides generally Odysseus is the type of the successful unscrupulous man, as soldier and politician—the incarnation of what the poet most hated. In Homer of course he is totally different.

P. 27, l. 301, Burn themselves and die.]—Women under these circumstances did commit suicide in Euripides' day, as they have ever since. It is rather curious that none of the characters of the play, not even Andromache, kills herself. The explanation must be that no such suicide was recorded in the tradition (though cf. below, on p. 33); a significant fact, suggesting that in the Homeric age, when this kind of treatment of women captives was regular, the victims did not suffer quite so terribly under it.

P. 28, l. 310, Hymen.]—She addresses the Torch. The shadowy Marriage-god "Hymen" was a torch and a cry as much as anything more personal. As a torch he is the sign both of marriage and of death, of sunrise and of the consuming fire. The full Moon was specially connected with marriage ceremonies.

P. 30, l. 356, Loxias.]—The name of Apollo as an Oracular God.

Pp. 30-34, ll. 360-460, Cassandra's visions.]—The allusions are to the various sufferings of Odysseus, as narrated in the *Odyssey,* and to the tragedies of the house of Atreus, as told for instance in Aeschylus' *Oresteia.* Agamemnon together with Cassandra, and in part because he brought Cassandra, was murdered—felled with an axe—on his return home by his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. Their bodies

were cast into a pit among the rocks. In vengeance for this, Orestes, Agamemnon's son, committed "mother-murder," and in consequence was driven by the Erinyes (Furies) of his mother into madness and exile.

P. 30, l. 370, This their king so wise.]—Agamemnon made the war for the sake of his brother Menelaus, and slew his daughter, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice at Aulis, to enable the ships to sail for Troy.

P. 31, ll. 394, 398, Hector and Paris.]—The point about Hector is clear, but as to Paris, the feeling that, after all, it was a glory that he and the half-divine Helen loved each other, is scarcely to be found anywhere else in Greek literature. (Cf., however, Isocrates' "Praise of Helen.") Paris and Helen were never idealised like Launcelot and Guinevere, or Tristram and Iseult.

P. 32, l. 423, A wise queen.]—Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus.

P. 33, l. 425, O Heralds, yea, Voices of Death.]—There is a play on the word for "heralds" in the Greek here, which I have evaded by a paraphrase. (*Κήρ-υκες* as though from *Κήρ* the death-spirit, "the one thing abhorred of all mortal men.")

P. 33, l. 430, That in this place she dies.]—The death of Hecuba is connected with a certain heap of stones on the shore of the Hellespont, called *Kunos-sêma,* or "Dog's Tomb." According to one tradition (Eur. *Hec.* 1259 ff.) she threw herself off the ship into the sea; according to another she was stoned by the Greeks for her curses upon the fleet; but in both she is changed after death into a sort of Hell-hound. M. Victor Bérard suggests that the dog first comes into the story owing to the accidental resemblance of the (hypothetical) Semitic word *S'qoulah,* "Stone" or "Stoning," and the Greek *Skulax,* dog. The Homeric Scylla (*Skulla*) was also both a Stone and a Dog (*Phéniciens et Odyssée,* i. 213). Of course in the present passage there is no direct reference to these wild sailor-stories.

P. 34, l. 456, The wind comes quick.]—*i. e.* The storm of the Prologue. Three Powers : the three Erinyes.

P. 36, l. 511 ff., Chorus.]—The Wooden Horse is always difficult to understand, and seems to have an obscuring effect on the language of poets who treat of it. I cannot help suspecting that the story arises from a real historical incident misunderstood. Troy, we are told, was still holding out after ten years and could not be taken, until at last by the divine suggestions of Athena, a certain Epeios devised a "Wooden Horse."

What was the "device"? According to the *Odyssey* and most Greek poets, it was a gigantic wooden figure of a horse. A party of heroes, led by Odysseus, got inside it and waited. The Greeks made a show of giving up the siege and sailed away, but only as far as Tenedos. The Trojans came out and found the horse, and after wondering greatly what it was meant for and what to do with it, made a breach in their walls and dragged it into the Citadel as a thank-offering to Pallas. In the night the Greeks returned; the heroes in the horse came out and opened the gates, and Troy was captured.

It seems possible that the "device" really was the building of a wooden siege-tower, as high as the walls, with a projecting and revolving neck. Such engines were (1) capable of being used at the time in Asia, as a rare and extraordinary device, because they exist on early Assyrian monuments; (2) certain to be misunderstood in Greek legendary tradition, because they were not used in Greek warfare till many centuries later. (First, perhaps, at the sieges of Perinthus and Byzantium by Philip of Macedon, 340 B.C.)

It is noteworthy that in the great picture by Polygnôtus in the Leschê at Delphi "above the wall of Troy appears the head alone of the Wooden Horse" (*Paus.* x. 26). Aeschylus also (*Ag.* 816) has some obscure phrases pointing in the same direction: "A horse's brood, a shield-bearing people, launched

with a leap about the Pleiads' setting, sprang clear above the wall," &c. Euripides here treats the horse metaphorically as a sort of war-horse trampling Troy.

P. 37, l. 536, Her that spareth not, Heaven's yokeless rider.]—Athena like a northern Valkyrie, as often in the *Iliad*. If one tries to imagine what Athena, the War-Goddess worshipped by the Athenian mob, was like—what a mixture of bad national passions, of superstition and statecraft, of slip-shod unimaginative idealisation—one may partly understand why Euripides made her so evil. Allegorists and high-minded philosophers might make Athena entirely noble by concentrating their minds on the beautiful elements in the tradition, and forgetting or explaining away all that was savage; he was determined to pin her down to the worst facts recorded of her, and let people worship such a being if they liked!

P. 38, l. 554, To Artemis.]—Maidens at the shrine of Artemis are a fixed datum in the tradition. (Cf. *Hec.* 935 ff.)

P. 39 ff., l. 576 ff., Andromache and Hecuba.]—This very beautiful scene is perhaps marred to most modern readers by an element which is merely a part of the convention of ancient mourning. Each of the mourners cries: "There is no affliction like mine!" and then proceeds to argue, as it were, against the other's counter claim. One can only say that it was, after all, what they expected of each other; and I believe the same convention exists in most places where keening or wailing is an actual practice.

P. 41, l. 604, Even as the sound of a song.]—I have filled in some words which seem to be missing in the Greek here.

Pp. 41-50, Andromache.]—This character is wonderfully studied. She seems to me to be a woman who has not yet shown much character or perhaps had very intense experience, but is only waiting for sufficiently great trials to become a heroine and a saint. There is still a marked element of conventionality in her description of her life with

Hector; but one feels, as she speaks, that she is already past it. Her character is built up of "*Sophrosyne,*" of self-restraint and the love of goodness—qualities which often seem second-rate or even tiresome until they have a sufficiently great field in which to act. Very characteristic is her resolution to make the best, and not the worst, of her life in Pyrrhus' house, with all its horror of suffering and apparent degradation. So is the self-conquest by which she deliberately refrains from cursing her child's murderers, for the sake of the last poor remnant of good she can still do to him, in getting him buried. The nobility of such a character depends largely, of course, on the intensity of the feelings conquered.

It is worth noting, in this connection, that Euripides is contradicting a wide-spread tradition (Robert, *Bild und Lied,* pp. 63 ff.). Andromache, in the pictures of the Sack of Troy, is represented with a great pestle or some such instrument fighting with the Soldiers to rescue Astyanax (*Ἀνδρο-μάχη* = "Man-fighting").

Observe, too, what a climax of drama is reached by means of the very fact that Andromache, to the utmost of her power, tries to do nothing "dramatic," but only what will be best. Her character in Euripides' play, *Andromache,* is, on the whole, similar to this, but less developed.

P. 51, l. 799 ff., In Salamis, filled with the foaming, &c.]—A striking instance of the artistic value of the Greek chorus in relieving an intolerable strain. The relief provided is something much higher than what we ordinarily call "relief"; it is a stream of pure poetry and music in key with the sadness of the surrounding scene, yet, in a way, happy just because it is beautiful. (Cf. note on *Hippolytus,* l. 732.)

The argument of the rather difficult lyric is: "This is not the first time Troy has been taken. Long ago Heracles made war against the old king Laomedon, because he had not given him the immortal steeds that he promised. And Telamon joined him;

Telamon who might have been happy in his island of Salamis, among the bees and the pleasant waters, looking over the strait to the olive-laden hills of Athens, the beloved City! And they took ship and slew Laomedon. Yea, twice Zeus has destroyed Ilion!

(Second part.) Is it all in vain that our Trojan princes have been loved by the Gods? Ganymêdês pours the nectar of Zeus in his banquets, his face never troubled, though his motherland is burned with fire! And, to say nothing of Zeus, how can the Goddess of Morning rise and shine upon us uncaring? She loved Tithônus, son of Laomedon, and bore him up from us in a chariot to be her husband in the skies. But all that once made them love us is gone!"

P. 52, l. 833, Pools of thy bathing.]—It is probable that Ganymêdês was himself originally a pool or a spring on Ida, now a pourer of nectar in heaven.

Pp. 54-63, Menelaus and Helen.]—The meeting of Menelaus and Helen after the taking of Troy was naturally one of the great moments in the heroic legend. The versions, roughly speaking, divide themselves into two. In one (*Little Iliad,* Ar. *Lysistr.* 155, Eur. *Andromache* 628) Menelaus is about to kill her, but as she bares her bosom to the sword, the sword falls from his hand. In the other (Stesichorus, *Sack of Ilion* (?)) Menelaus or some one else takes her to the ships to be stoned, and the men cannot stone her. As Quintus of Smyrna says, "They looked on her as they would on a God!"

Both versions have affected Euripides here. And his Helen has just the magic of the Helen of legend. That touch of the supernatural which belongs of right to the Child of Heaven—a mystery, a gentleness, a strange absence of fear or wrath—is felt through all her words. One forgets to think of her guilt or innocence; she is too wonderful a being to judge, too precious to destroy. This supernatural element, being the thing which, if true, separates Helen from other women, and in a way redeems her, is for that

reason exactly what Hecuba denies. The controversy has a certain eternal quality about it: the hypothesis of heavenly enchantment and the hypothesis of mere bad behaviour, neither of them entirely convincing! But the very curses of those that hate her make a kind of superhuman atmosphere about Helen in this play; she fills the background like a great well-spring of pain.

This Menelaus, however, is rather different from the traditional Menelaus. Besides being the husband of Helen, he is the typical Conqueror, for whose sake the Greeks fought and to whom the central prize of the war belongs. And we take him at the height of his triumph, the very moment for which he made the war! Hence the peculiar bitterness with which he is treated, his conquest turning to ashes in his mouth, and his love a confused turmoil of hunger and hatred, contemptible and yet terrible.

The exit of the scene would leave a modern audience quite in doubt as to what happened, unless the action were much clearer than the words. But all Athenians knew from the *Odyssey* that the pair were swiftly reconciled, and lived happily together as King and Queen of Sparta.

P. 54, l. 884, Thou deep base of the world.]—These lines, as a piece of religious speculation, were very famous in antiquity. And dramatically they are most important. All through the play Hecuba is a woman of remarkable intellectual power and of fearless thought. She does not definitely deny the existence of the Olympian gods, like some characters in Euripides, but she treats them as beings that have betrayed her, and whose name she scarcely deigns to speak. It is the very godlessness of Hecuba's fortitude that makes it so terrible and, properly regarded, so noble. (Cf. p. 35 "Why call on things so weak?" and p. 74 "They know, they know . . .") Such Gods were as a matter of fact the moral inferiors of good men, and Euripides will never blind his eyes to their inferiority. And as soon as people see that their

god is bad, they tend to cease believing in his existence at all. (Hecuba's answer to Helen is not inconsistent with this, it is only less characteristic.)

Behind this Olympian system, however, there is a possibility of some real Providence or impersonal Governance of the world, to which here, for a moment, Hecuba makes a passionate approach. If there is *any* explanation, *any* justice, even in the form of mere punishment of the wicked, she will be content and give worship! But it seems that there is not. Then at last there remains—what most but not all modern freethinkers would probably have begun to doubt at the very beginning—the world of the departed, the spirits of the dead, who are true, and in their dim way love her still (p. 71 " Thy father far away shall comfort thee," and the last scene of the play).

This last religion, faint and shattered by doubt as it is, represents a return to the most primitive " Pelasgian " beliefs, a worship of the Dead which existed long before the Olympian system, and has long outlived it.

P. 57, l. 922, The fire-brand's image.]—Hecuba, just before Paris' birth, dreamed that she gave birth to a fire-brand. The prophets therefore advised that the babe should be killed; but Priam disobeyed them.

P. 57, l. 924, Three Crowns of Life.]—On the Judgment of Paris see Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena,* pp. 292 ff. Late writers degrade the story into a beauty contest between three thoroughly personal goddesses—and a contest complicated by bribery. But originally the Judgment is rather a Choice between three possible lives, like the Choice of Heracles between Work and Idleness. The elements of the choice vary in different versions: but in general Hera is royalty; Athena is prowess in war or personal merit; Aphrodite, of course, is love. And the goddesses are not really to be distinguished from the gifts they bring. They are what they give, and nothing more. Cf. the wonderful lyric *Androm.* 274 ff., where they come to " a young

man walking to and fro alone, in an empty hut in the firelight."

There is an extraordinary effect in Helen herself *being* one of the Crowns of Life—a fair equivalent for the throne of the world.

P. 57, l. 940 ff., Alexander . . . Paris.]—Two plays on words in the Greek.

P. 58, l. 956, The old Gate-Warden.]—He and the Watchers are, of course, safely dead. But on the general lines of the tradition it may well be that Helen is speaking the truth. She loved both Menelaus and Paris; and, according to some versions, hated Dêïphobus, the Trojan prince who seized her after Paris' death. There is a reference to Dêïphobus in the MSS. of the play here, but I follow Wilamowitz in thinking it spurious.

Pp. 63 ff., Chorus.]—On the Trojan Zeus see above, on p. 11. Mount Ida caught the rays of the rising sun in some special manner and distributed them to the rest of the world; and in this gleam of heavenly fire the God had his dwelling, which is now the brighter for the flames of his City going up like incense!

Nothing definite is known of the Golden Images and the Moon-Feasts.

P. 64, l. 1088, Towers of the Giants.]—The prehistoric castles of Tiryns and Mycênae.

P. 65, l. 1111, May Helen be there.]—(Cf. above.) Pitanê was one of the five divisions of Sparta. Athena had a "Bronzen House" on the acropolis of Sparta. Simoïs, of course, the river of Troy.

P. 71, l. 1232, I make thee whole.]—Here as elsewhere Hecuba fluctuates between fidelity to the oldest and most instinctive religion, and a rejection of all Gods.

P. 72, l. 1240, Lo, I have seen the open hand of God.]—The text is, perhaps, imperfect here; but Professor Wilamowitz agrees with me that Hecuba has seen something like a vision. The meaning of this speech is of the utmost importance. It expresses

the inmost theme of the whole play, a search for an answer to the injustice of suffering in the very splendour and beauty of suffering. Of course it must be suffering of a particular kind, or, what comes to the same thing, suffering borne in a particular way; but in that case the answer seems to me to hold. One does not really think the world evil because there are martyrs or heroes in it. For them the elements of beauty which exist in any great trial of the spirit become so great as to overpower the evil that created them—to turn it from shame and misery into tragedy. Of course to most sufferers, to children and animals and weak people, or those without inspiration, the doctrine brings no help. It is a thing invented by a poet for himself.

P. 75, l. 1288, Thou of the Ages.]—The Phrygian All-Father, identified with Zeus, son of Kronos. (Cf. on p. 11.)

P. 76, l. 1304, Now hast thou found thy prayer.]—The Gods have deserted her, but she has still the dead. (Cf. above, on p. 71.)

P. 79, l. 1332, Forth to the dark Greek ships.]—Curiously like another magnificent ending of a great poem, that of the *Chanson de Roland,* where Charlemagne is called forth on a fresh quest:

> " Deus," dist li Reis, " si penuse est ma vie! "
> Pluret des oilz, sa barbe blanche tiret. . . .

THE
ELECTRA
OF
EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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INTRODUCTION[1]

THE *Electra* of Euripides has the distinction of being, perhaps, the best abused, and, one might add, not the best understood, of ancient tragedies. "A singular monument of poetical, or rather unpoetical perversity;" "the very worst of all his pieces;" are, for instance, the phrases applied to it by Schlegel. Considering that he judged it by the standards of conventional classicism, he could scarcely have arrived at any different conclusion. For it is essentially, and perhaps consciously, a protest against those standards. So, indeed, is the tragedy of *The Trojan Women*; but on very different lines. The *Electra* has none of the imaginative splendour, the vastness, the intense poetry, of that wonderful work. It is a close-knit, powerful, well-constructed play, as realistic as the tragic conventions will allow, intellectual and rebellious. Its psychology reminds one of Browning, or even of Ibsen.

To a fifth-century Greek all history came in the form of legend; and no less than three extant tragedies, Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* (456 B.C.), Euripides' *Electra* (413 B.C.), and Sophocles' *Electra* (date unknown: but perhaps the latest of the three) are based on the particular piece of legend or history now before us. It narrates how the son and daughter

[1] Most of this introduction is reprinted, by the kind permission of the Editors, from an article in the *Independent Review*, vol. i. No. 4.

of the murdered king, Agamemnon, slew, in due course of revenge, and by Apollo's express command, their guilty mother and her paramour.

Homer had long since told the story, as he tells so many, simply and grandly, without moral questioning and without intensity. The atmosphere is heroic. It is all a blood-feud between chieftains, in which Orestes, after seven years, succeeds in slaying his foe Aegisthus, who had killed his father. He probably killed his mother also; but we are not directly told so. His sister may have helped him, and he may possibly have gone mad afterwards; but these painful issues are kept determinedly in the shade.

Somewhat surprisingly, Sophocles, although by his time Electra and Clytemnestra had become leading figures in the story and the mother-murder its essential climax, preserves a very similar atmosphere. His tragedy is enthusiastically praised by Schlegel for "the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, that is diffused over so dreadful a subject." "Everything dark and ominous is avoided. Orestes enjoys the fulness of health and strength. He is beset neither with doubts nor stings of conscience." Especially laudable is the "austerity" with which Aegisthus is driven into the house to receive, according to Schlegel, a specially ignominious death!

This combination of matricide and good spirits, however satisfactory to the determined classicist, will probably strike most intelligent readers as a little curious, and even, if one may use the word at all in connection with so powerful a play, undramatic. It

becomes intelligible as soon as we observe that Sophocles was deliberately seeking what he regarded as an archaic or "Homeric" style (cf. Jebb, Introd. p. xli.); and this archaism, in its turn, seems to me best explained as a conscious reaction against Euripides' searching and unconventional treatment of the same subject (cf. Wilamowitz in *Hermes*, xviii. pp. 214 ff.). In the result Sophocles is not only more "classical" than Euripides; he is more primitive by far than Aeschylus.

For Aeschylus, though steeped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions, and above all would not, in that region, play at make-believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror; realises it; and tries to surmount it on the sweep of a great wave of religious emotion. The mother-murder, even if done by a god's command, is a sin; a sin to be expiated by unfathomable suffering. Yet, since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is a duty also. It is a sin that *must* be committed.

Euripides, here as often, represents intellectually the thought of Aeschylus carried a step further. He faced the problem just as Aeschylus did, and as Sophocles did not. But the solution offered by Aeschylus did not satisfy him. It cannot, in its actual details, satisfy any one. To him the mother-murder—like most acts of revenge, but more than most—was a sin and a horror. Therefore it should

not have been committed; and the god who enjoined it *did* command evil, as he had done in a hundred other cases! He is no god of light; he is only a demon of old superstition, acting, among other influences, upon a sore-beset man, and driving him towards a miscalled duty, the horror of which, when done, will unseat his reason.

But another problem interests Euripides even more than this. What kind of man was it—above all, what kind of woman can it have been, who would do this deed of mother-murder, not in sudden fury but deliberately, as an act of "justice," after many years? A "sympathetic" hero and heroine are out of the question; and Euripides does not deal in stage villains. He seeks real people. And few attentive readers of this play can doubt that he has found them.

The son is an exile, bred in the desperate hopes and wild schemes of exile; he is a prince without a kingdom, always dreaming of his wrongs and his restoration; and driven by the old savage doctrine, which an oracle has confirmed, of the duty and manliness of revenge. He is, as was shown by his later history, a man subject to overpowering impulses and to fits of will-less brooding. Lastly, he is very young, and is swept away by his sister's intenser nature.

That sister *is* the central figure of the tragedy. A woman shattered in childhood by the shock of an experience too terrible for a girl to bear; a poisoned and a haunted woman, eating her heart in ceaseless broodings of hate and love, alike unsatisfied—hate

against her mother and stepfather, love for her dead father and her brother in exile; a woman who has known luxury and state, and cares much for them; who is intolerant of poverty, and who feels her youth passing away. And meantime there is her name, on which all legend, if I am not mistaken, insists; she is *A-lektra*, "the Unmated."

There is, perhaps, no woman's character in the range of Greek tragedy so profoundly studied. Not Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, not Phaedra nor Medea. One's thoughts can only wander towards two great heroines of "lost" plays, Althaea in the *Meleager*, and Stheneboea in the *Bellerophon*.

G. M.

ELECTRA

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CLYTEMNESTRA, *Queen of Argos and Mycenae; widow of Agamemnon.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, now in banishment.*

A PEASANT, *husband of Electra.*

AN OLD MAN, *formerly servant to Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophios, King of Phocis; friend to Orestes.*

AEGISTHUS, *usurping King of Argos and Mycenae, now husband of Clytemnestra.*

The Heroes CASTOR and POLYDEUCES.

CHORUS of Argive Women, with their LEADER.

FOLLOWERS of ORESTES; HANDMAIDS of CLYTEMNESTRA.

The Scene is laid in the mountains of Argos. The play was first produced between the years 414 and 412 B.C.

ELECTRA

The scene represents a hut on a desolate mountain side; the river Inachus is visible in the distance. The time is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The PEASANT *is discovered in front of the hut.*

PEASANT.

Old gleam on the face of the world, I give thee hail,
River of Argos land, where sail on sail
The long ships met, a thousand, near and far,
When Agamemnon walked the seas in war;
Who smote King Priam in the dust, and burned
The storied streets of Ilion, and returned
Above all conquerors, heaping tower and fane
Of Argos high with spoils of Eastern slain.
So in far lands he prospered; and at home
His own wife trapped and slew him. 'Twas the doom
Aegisthus wrought, son of his father's foe.
Gone is that King, and the old spear laid low
That Tantalus wielded when the world was young.
Aegisthus hath his queen, and reigns among
His people. And the children here alone,
Orestes and Electra, buds unblown

Of man and womanhood, when forth to Troy
He shook his sail and left them—lo, the boy
Orestes, ere Aegisthus' hand could fall,
Was stolen from Argos—borne by one old thrall,
Who served his father's boyhood, over seas
Far off, and laid upon King Strophios' knees
In Phocis, for the old king's sake. But here
The maid Electra waited, year by year,
Alone, till the warm days of womanhood
Drew nigh and suitors came of gentle blood
In Hellas. Then Aegisthus was in fear
Lest she be wed in some great house, and bear
A son to avenge her father. Close he wrought
Her prison in his house, and gave her not
To any wooer. Then, since even this
Was full of peril, and the secret kiss
Of some bold prince might find her yet, and rend
Her prison walls, Aegisthus at the end
Would slay her. Then her mother, she so wild
Aforetime, pled with him and saved her child.
Her heart had still an answer for her lord
Murdered, but if the child's blood spoke, what word
Could meet the hate thereof? After that day
Aegisthus thus decreed: whoso should slay
The old king's wandering son, should win rich meed
Of gold; and for Electra, she must wed
With me, not base of blood—in that I stand
True Mycenaean—but in gold and land
Most poor, which maketh highest birth as naught.
So from a powerless husband shall be wrought
A powerless peril. Had some man of might
Possessed her, he had called perchance to light

Her father's blood, and unknown vengeances
Risen on Aegisthus yet.
Aye, mine she is:
But never yet these arms—the Cyprian knows
My truth!—have clasped her body, and she goes
A virgin still. Myself would hold it shame
To abase this daughter of a royal name.
I am too lowly to love violence. Yea,
Orestes too doth move me, far away,
Mine unknown brother! Will he ever now
Come back and see his sister bowed so low?
Doth any deem me fool, to hold a fair
Maid in my room and seek no joy, but spare
Her maidenhood? If any such there be,
Let him but look within. The fool is he
In gentle things, weighing the more and less
Of love by his own heart's untenderness.

[*As he ceases* ELECTRA *comes out of the hut. She is in mourning garb, and carries a large pitcher on her head. She speaks without observing the* PEASANT'S *presence.*

ELECTRA.

Dark shepherdess of many a golden star,
Dost see me, Mother Night? And how this jar
Hath worn my earth-bowed head, as forth and fro
For water to the hillward springs I go?
Not for mere stress of need, but purpose set,
That never day nor night God may forget
Aegisthus' sin: aye, and perchance a cry
Cast forth to the waste shining of the sky

May find my father's ear. . . . The woman bred
Of Tyndareus, my mother—on her head
Be curses!—from my house hath outcast me;
She hath borne children to our enemy;
She hath made me naught, she hath made Orestes naught. . . .

[*As the bitterness of her tone increases, the* PEASANT *comes forward.*

PEASANT.

What wouldst thou now, my sad one, ever fraught
With toil to lighten my toil? And so soft
Thy nurture was! Have I not chid thee oft,
And thou wilt cease not, serving without end?

ELECTRA (*turning to him with impulsive affection*).

O friend, my friend, as God might be my friend,
Thou only hast not trampled on my tears.
Life scarce can be so hard, 'mid many fears
And many shames, when mortal heart can find
Somewhere one healing touch, as my sick mind
Finds thee. . . . And should I wait thy word, to endure
A little for thine easing, yea, or pour
My strength out in thy toiling fellowship?
Thou hast enough with fields and kine to keep;
'Tis mine to make all bright within the door.
'Tis joy to him that toils, when toil is o'er,
To find home waiting, full of happy things.

PEASANT.

If so it please thee, go thy way. The springs
Are not far off. And I before the morn
Must drive my team afield, and sow the corn
In the hollows.—Not a thousand prayers can gain
A man's bare bread, save an he work amain.

[ELECTRA *and the* PEASANT *depart on their several ways. After a few moments there enter stealthily two armed men,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Thou art the first that I have known in deed
True and my friend, and shelterer of my need.
Thou only, Pylades, of all that knew,
Hast held Orestes of some worth, all through
These years of helplessness, wherein I lie
Downtrodden by the murderer—yea, and by
The murderess, my mother! . . . I am come,
Fresh from the cleansing of Apollo, home
To Argos—and my coming no man yet
Knoweth—to pay the bloody twain their debt
Of blood. This very night I crept alone
To my dead father's grave, and poured thereon
My heart's first tears and tresses of my head
New-shorn, and o'er the barrow of the dead
Slew a black lamb, unknown of them that reign
In this unhappy land. . . . I am not fain
To pass the city gates, but hold me here
Hard on the borders. So my road is clear

To fly if men look close and watch my way;
If not, to seek my sister. For men say
She dwelleth in these hills, no more a maid
But wedded. I must find her house, for aid
To guide our work, and learn what hath betid
Of late in Argos.—Ha, the radiant lid
Of Dawn's eye lifteth! Come, friend; leave we now
This trodden path. Some worker of the plough,
Or serving damsel at her early task
Will presently come by, whom we may ask
If here my sister dwells. But soft! Even now
I see some bondmaid there, her death-shorn brow
Bending beneath its freight of well-water.
Lie close until she pass; then question her.
A slave might help us well, or speak some sign
Of import to this work of mine and thine.

[*The two men retire into ambush.* ELECTRA *enters, returning from the well.*

ELECTRA.

Onward, O labouring tread,
As on move the years;
Onward amid thy tears,
O happier dead!

Let me remember. I am she, [*Strophe* 1.
Agamemnon's child, and the mother of me
Clytemnestra, the evil Queen,
Helen's sister. And folk, I ween,
That pass in the streets call yet my name
Electra. . . . God protect my shame!

For toil, toil is a weary thing,
And life is heavy about my head;
And thou far off, O Father and King,
In the lost lands of the dead.
A bloody twain made these things be;
One was thy bitterest enemy,
And one the wife that lay by thee.

Brother, brother, on some far shore [*Antistrophe* 1.
Hast thou a city, is there a door
That knows thy footfall, Wandering One?
Who left me, left me, when all our pain
Was bitter about us, a father slain,
And a girl that wept in her room alone.
Thou couldst break me this bondage sore,
Only thou, who art far away,
Loose our father, and wake once more. . . .
Zeus, Zeus, dost hear me pray? . . .
The sleeping blood and the shame and the doom!
O feet that rest not, over the foam
Of distant seas, come home, come home!

What boots this cruse that I carry? [*Strophe* 2.
O, set free my brow!
For the gathered tears that tarry
Through the day and the dark till now,
Now in the dawn are free,
Father, and flow beneath
The floor of the world, to be
As a song in the house of Death:
From the rising up of the day
They guide my heart alway,
The silent tears unshed,
And my body mourns for the dead;

My cheeks bleed silently,
And these bruisèd temples keep
Their pain, remembering thee
And thy bloody sleep.

Be rent, O hair of mine head!

As a swan crying alone
Where the river windeth cold,
For a loved, for a silent one,
Whom the toils of the fowler hold,
I cry, Father, to thee,
O slain in misery!

The water, the wan water, [*Antistrophe* 2.
Lapped him, and his head
Drooped in the bed of slaughter
Low, as one wearièd;
Woe for the edgèd axe,
And woe for the heart of hate,
Houndlike about thy tracks,
O conqueror desolate,
From Troy over land and sea,
Till a wife stood waiting thee;
Not with crowns did she stand,
Nor flowers of peace in her hand;
With Aegisthus' dagger drawn
For her hire she strove,
Through shame and through blood alone;
And won her a traitor's love.

[*As she ceases there enter from right and left the* Chorus, *consisting of women of Argos, young and old, in festal dress.*

CHORUS.

Some Women.

Child of the mighty dead, [*Strophe.*
  Electra, lo, my way
To thee in the dawn hath sped,
  And the cot on the mountain grey,
  For the Watcher hath cried this day:
He of the ancient folk,
  The walker of waste and hill,
Who drinketh the milk of the flock;
  And he told of Hera's will;
For the morrow's morrow now
  They cry her festival,
And before her throne shall bow
    Our damsels all.

ELECTRA.

Not unto joy, nor sweet
  Music, nor shining of gold,
The wings of my spirit beat.
  Let the brides of Argos hold
  Their dance in the night, as of old;
I lead no dance; I mark
  No beat as the dancers sway;
With tears I dwell in the dark,
  And my thought is of tears alway,
  To the going down of the day.
Look on my wasted hair
And raiment. . . . This that I bear,

Is it meet for the King my sire,
And her whom the King begot?
For Troy, that was burned with fire
And forgetteth not?

CHORUS.

Other Women.

Hera is great!—Ah, come, [*Antistrophe.*
Be kind; and my hand shall bring
Fair raiment, work of the loom,
And many a golden thing,
For joyous robe-wearing.
Deemest thou this thy woe
Shall rise unto God as prayer,
Or bend thine haters low?
Doth God for thy pain have care?
Not tears for the dead nor sighs,
But worship and joy divine
Shall win thee peace in thy skies,
O daughter mine!

ELECTRA.

No care cometh to God
For the voice of the helpless; none
For the crying of ancient blood.
Alas for him that is gone,
And for thee, O wandering one:
That now, methinks, in a land
Of the stranger must toil for hire,
And stand where the poor men stand,
A-cold by another's fire,
O son of the mighty sire:

While I in a beggar's cot
On the wrecked hills, changing not,
Starve in my soul for food;
But our mother lieth wed
In another's arms, and blood
Is about her bed.

LEADER.

On all of Greece she wrought great jeopardy,
Thy mother's sister, Helen,—and on thee.

[ORESTES *and* PYLADES *move out from their concealment;* ORESTES *comes forward:* PYLADES *beckons to two* ARMED SERVANTS *and stays with them in the background.*

ELECTRA.

Woe's me! No more of wailing! Women, flee!
Strange armèd men beside the dwelling there
Lie ambushed! They are rising from their lair.
Back by the road, all you. I will essay
The house; and may our good feet save us!

ORESTES (*between* ELECTRA *and the hut*).

Stay,
Unhappy woman! Never fear my steel.

ELECTRA (*in utter panic*).

O bright Apollo! Mercy! See, I kneel;
Slay me not.

ORESTES.

Others I have yet to slay
Less dear than thou.

ELECTRA.

Go from me! Wouldst thou lay
Hand on a body that is not for thee?

ORESTES.

None is there I would touch more righteously.

ELECTRA.

Why lurk'st thou by my house? And why a sword?

ORESTES.

Stay. Listen! Thou wilt not gainsay my word.

ELECTRA.

There—I am still. Do what thou wilt with me.
Thou art too strong.

ORESTES.

A word I bear to thee . . .
Word of thy brother.

ELECTRA.

Oh, friend! More than friend!
Living or dead?

ORESTES.

He lives; so let me send
My comfort foremost, ere the rest be heard.

ELECTRA.

God love thee for the sweetness of thy word!

ORESTES.

God love the twain of us, both thee and me.

ELECTRA.

He lives! Poor brother! In what land weareth he
His exile?

ORESTES.

Not one region nor one lot
His wasted life hath trod.

ELECTRA.

He lacketh not
For bread?

ORESTES.

Bread hath he; but a man is weak
In exile.

ELECTRA.

What charge laid he on thee? Speak.

ORESTES.

To learn if thou still live, and how the storm,
Living, hath struck thee.

ELECTRA.

That thou seest; this form
Wasted . . .

ORESTES.

Yea, riven with the fire of woe.
I sigh to look on thee.

ELECTRA.

My face; and, lo,
My temples of their ancient glory shorn.

ORESTES.

Methinks thy brother haunts thee, being forlorn;
Aye, and perchance thy father, whom they slew. . .

ELECTRA.

What should be nearer to me than those two?

ORESTES.

And what to him, thy brother, half so dear
As thou?

ELECTRA.

His is a distant love, not near
At need.

ORESTES.

But why this dwelling place, this life
Of loneliness?

ELECTRA (*with sudden bitterness*).

Stranger, I am a wife. . . .
O better dead!

ORESTES.

That seals thy brother's doom!
What Prince of Argos . . .?

ELECTRA.

Not the man to whom
My father thought to give me.

ORESTES.

Speak; that I
May tell thy brother all.

ELECTRA.

'Tis there, hard by,
His dwelling, where I live, far from men's eyes.

ORESTES.

Some ditcher's cot, or cowherd's, by its guise!

ELECTRA (*struck with shame for her ingratitude*).

A poor man; but true-hearted, and to me
God-fearing.

ORESTES.

How? What fear of God hath he?

ELECTRA.

He hath never held my body to his own.

ORESTES.

Hath he some vow to keep? Or is it done
To scorn thee?

ELECTRA.

Nay; he only scorns to sin
Against my father's greatness.

ORESTES.

But to win
A princess! Doth his heart not leap for pride?

ELECTRA.

He honoureth not the hand that gave the bride.

ORESTES.

I see. He trembles for Orestes' wrath?

ELECTRA.

Aye, that would move him. But beside, he hath
A gentle heart.

ORESTES.

Strange! A good man. . . . I swear
He well shall be requited.

ELECTRA.

Whensoe'er
Our wanderer comes again!

ORESTES.

Thy mother stays
Unmoved 'mid all thy wrong?

ELECTRA.

A lover weighs
More than a child in any woman's heart.

ORESTES.

But what end seeks Aegisthus, by such art
Of shame?

ELECTRA.

To make mine unborn children low
And weak, even as my husband.

ORESTES.

Lest there grow
From thee the avenger?

ELECTRA.

Such his purpose is:
For which may I requite him!

ORESTES.

And of this
Thy virgin life—Aegisthus knows it?

ELECTRA.

Nay,
We speak it not. It cometh not his way.

ORESTES.

These women hear us. Are they friends to thee?

ELECTRA.

Aye, friends and true. They will keep faithfully
All words of mine and thine.

ORESTES (*trying her*).

Thou art well stayed
With friends. And could Orestes give thee aid
In aught, if e'er . . .

ELECTRA.

Shame on thee! Seest thou not?
Is it not time?

ORESTES (*catching her excitement*).

How time? And if he sought
To slay, how should he come at his desire?

ELECTRA.

By daring, as they dared who slew his sire!

ORESTES.

Wouldst thou dare with him, if he came, thou too,
To slay h e r?

ELECTRA.

Yes; with the same axe that slew
My father!

ORESTES.

'Tis thy message? And thy mood
Unchanging?

ELECTRA.

Let me shed my mother's blood,
And I die happy.

ORESTES.

God! . . . I would that now
Orestes heard thee here.

ELECTRA.

Yet, wottest thou,
Though here I saw him, I should know him not.

ORESTES.

Surely. Ye both were children, when they wrought
Your parting.

ELECTRA.

One alone in all this land
Would know his face.

ORESTES.

The thrall, methinks, whose hand
Stole him from death—or so the story ran?

ELECTRA.

He taught my father, too, an old old man
Of other days than these.

ORESTES.

Thy father's grave . . .
He had due rites and tendance?

ELECTRA.

What chance gave,
My father had, cast out to rot in the sun.

ORESTES.

God, 'tis too much! . . . To hear of such things done
Even to a stranger, stings a man. . . . But speak,
Tell of thy life, that I may know, and seek
Thy brother with a tale that must be heard
Howe'er it sicken. If mine eyes be blurred,
Remember, 'tis the fool that feels not. Aye,
Wisdom is full of pity; and thereby
Men pay for too much wisdom with much pain.

LEADER.

My heart is moved as this man's. I would fain
Learn all thy tale. Here dwelling on the hills
Little I know of Argos and its ills.

ELECTRA.

If I must speak—and at love's call, God knows,
I fear not—I will tell thee all; my woes,
My father's woes, and—O, since thou hast stirred
This storm of speech, thou bear him this my word—
His woes and shame! Tell of this narrow cloak
In the wind; this grime and reek of toil, that choke
My breathing; this low roof that bows my head
After a king's. This raiment . . . thread by thread,
'Tis I must weave it, or go bare—must bring,
Myself, each jar of water from the spring.
No holy day for me, no festival,
No dance upon the green! From all, from all
I am cut off. No portion hath my life
'Mid wives of Argos, being no true wife.
No portion where the maidens throng to praise
Castor—my Castor, whom in ancient days,

Ere he passed from us and men worshipped him,
They named my bridegroom!—
And she, s h e! . . . The grim
Troy spoils gleam round her throne, and by each hand
Queens of the East, my father's prisoners, stand,
A cloud of Orient webs and tangling gold.
And there upon the floor, the blood, the old
Black blood, yet crawls and cankers, like a rot
In the stone! And on our father's chariot
The murderer's foot stands glorying, and the red
False hand uplifts that ancient staff, that led
The armies of the world! . . . Aye, tell him how
The grave of Agamemnon, even now,
Lacketh the common honour of the dead;
A desert barrow, where no tears are shed,
No tresses hung, no gift, no myrtle spray.
And when the wine is in him, so men say,
Our mother's mighty master leaps thereon,
Spurning the slab, or pelteth stone on stone,
Flouting the lone dead and the twain that live:
"Where is thy son Orestes? Doth he give
Thy tomb good tendance? Or is all forgot?"
So is he scorned because he cometh not. . . .
O Stranger, on my knees, I charge thee, tell
This tale, not mine, but of dumb wrongs that swell
Crowding—and I the trumpet of their pain,
This tongue, these arms, this bitter burning brain;
These dead shorn locks, and he for whom they died!
His father slew Troy's thousands in their pride:
He hath but one to kill. . . . O God, but one!
Is he a man, and Agamemnon's son?

LEADER.

But hold: is this thy husband from the plain,
His labour ended, hasting home again?

Enter the PEASANT.

PEASANT.

Ha, who be these? Strange men in arms before
My house! What would they at this lonely door?
Seek they for me?—Strange gallants should not stay
A woman's goings.

ELECTRA.

Friend and helper!—Nay,
Think not of any evil. These men be
Friends of Orestes, charged with words for me! . . .
Strangers, forgive his speech.

PEASANT.

What word have they
Of him? At least he lives and sees the day?

ELECTRA.

So fares their tale—and sure I doubt it not!

PEASANT.

And ye two still are living in his thought,
Thou and his father?

ELECTRA.

In his dreams we live.
An exile hath small power.

PEASANT.

And did he give
Some privy message?

ELECTRA.

None: they come as spies
For news of me.

PEASANT.

Thine outward news their eyes
Can see; the rest, methinks, thyself will tell.

ELECTRA.

They have seen all, heard all. I trust them well.

PEASANT.

Why were our doors not open long ago?—
Be welcome, strangers both, and pass below
My lintel. In return for your glad words
Be sure all greeting that mine house affords
Is yours.—Ye followers, bear in their gear!—
Gainsay me not; for his sake are ye dear
That sent you to our house; and though my part
In life be low, I am no churl at heart.

[*The* PEASANT *goes to the* ARMED SERVANTS *at the back, to help them with the baggage.*

ORESTES (*aside to* ELECTRA).

Is this the man that shields thy maidenhood
Unknown, and will not wrong thy father's blood?

ELECTRA.

He is called my husband. 'Tis for him I toil.

ORESTES.

How dark lies honour hid! And what turmoil
In all things human: sons of mighty men
Fallen to naught, and from ill seed again
Good fruit: yea, famine in the rich man's scroll
Writ deep, and in poor flesh a lordly soul.
As, lo, this man, not great in Argos, not
With pride of house uplifted, in a lot
Of unmarked life hath shown a prince's grace.
[*To the* PEASANT, *who has returned.*
All that is here of Agamemnon's race,
And all that lacketh yet, for whom we come,
Do thank thee, and the welcome of thy home
Accept with gladness.—Ho, men; hasten ye
Within!—This open-hearted poverty
Is blither to my sense than feasts of gold.
Lady, thine husband's welcome makes me bold;
Yet would thou hadst thy brother, before all
Confessed, to greet us in a prince's hall!
Which may be, even yet. Apollo spake
The word; and surely, though small store I make
Of man's divining, God will fail us not.
[ORESTES *and* PYLADES *go in, following the* SERVANTS.

LEADER.

O never was the heart of hope so hot
Within me. How? So moveless in time past,
Hath Fortune girded up her loins at last?

ELECTRA.

Now know'st thou not thine own ill furniture,
To bid these strangers in, to whom for sure
Our best were hardship, men of gentle breed?

PEASANT.

Nay, if the men be gentle, as indeed
I deem them, they will take good cheer or ill
With even kindness.

ELECTRA.

'Twas ill done; but still—
Go, since so poor thou art, to that old friend
Who reared my father. At the realm's last end
He dwells, where Tanaos river foams between
Argos and Sparta. Long time hath he been
An exile 'mid his flocks. Tell him what thing
Hath chanced on me, and bid him haste and bring
Meat for the strangers' tending.—Glad, I trow,
That old man's heart will be, and many a vow
Will lift to God, to learn the child he stole
From death, yet breathes.—I will not ask a dole
From home; how should my mother help me? Nay,
I pity him that seeks that door, to say
Orestes liveth!

PEASANT.

Wilt thou have it so?
I will take word to the old man. But go
Quickly within, and whatso there thou find
Set out for them. A woman, if her mind
So turn, can light on many a pleasant thing
To fill her board. And surely plenishing
We have for this one day.—'Tis in such shifts

As these, I care for riches, to make gifts
To friends, or lead a sick man back to health
With ease and plenty. Else small aid is wealth
For daily gladness ; once a man be done
With hunger, rich and poor are all as one.

[*The* PEASANT *goes off to the left ;* ELECTRA *goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

O for the ships of Troy, the beat [*Strophe* 1.
Of oars that shimmered
Innumerable, and dancing feet
Of Nereids glimmered ;
And dolphins, drunken with the lyre,
Across the dark blue prows, like fire,
Did bound and quiver,
To cleave the way for Thetis' son,
Fleet-in-the-wind Achilles, on
To war, to war, till Troy be won
Beside the reedy river.

Up from Eubœa's caverns came [*Antistrophe* 1.
The Nereids, bearing
Gold armour from the Lords of Flame,
Wrought for his wearing :
Long sought those daughters of the deep,
Up Pelion's glen, up Ossa's steep
Forest enchanted,
Where Peleus reared alone, afar,
His lost sea-maiden's child, the star
Of Hellas, and swift help of war
When weary armies panted.

There came a man from Troy, and told [*Strophe* 2.
Here in the haven,
How, orb on orb, to strike with cold
The Trojan, o'er that targe of gold,
Dread shapes were graven.
All round the level rim thereof
Perseus, on wingèd feet, above
The long seas hied him;
The Gorgon's wild and bleeding hair
He lifted; and a herald fair,
He of the wilds, whom Maia bare,
God's Hermes, flew beside him.

[*Antistrophe* 2.
But midmost, where the boss rose higher,
A sun stood blazing,
And wingèd steeds, and stars in choir,
Hyad and Pleiad, fire on fire,
For Hector's dazing:
Across the golden helm, each way,
Two taloned Sphinxes held their prey,
Song-drawn to slaughter:
And round the breastplate ramping came
A mingled breed of lion and flame,
Hot-eyed to tear that steed of fame
That found Pirênê's water.

The red red sword with steeds four-yoked [*Epode.*
Black-maned, was graven,
That laboured, and the hot dust smoked
Cloudwise to heaven.

Thou Tyndarid woman! Fair and tall
Those warriors were, and o'er them all
One king great-hearted,
Whom thou and thy false love did slay:
Therefore the tribes of Heaven one day
For these thy dead shall send on thee
An iron death: yea, men shall see
The white throat drawn, and blood's red spray,
And lips in terror parted.

[*As they cease, there enters from the left a very old man, bearing a lamb, a wineskin, and a wallet.*

OLD MAN.

Where is my little Princess? Ah, not now;
But still my queen, who tended long ago
The lad that was her father. . . . How steep-set
These last steps to her porch! But faint not yet:
Onward, ye failing knees and back with pain
Bowed, till we look on that dear face again.

[*Enter* ELECTRA.

Ah, daughter, is it thou?—Lo, here I am,
With gifts from all my store; this suckling lamb
Fresh from the ewe, green crowns for joyfulness,
And creamy things new-curdled from the press.
And this long-storèd juice of vintages
Forgotten, cased in fragrance: scant it is,
But passing sweet to mingle nectar-wise
With feebler wine.—Go, bear them in; mine eyes . . .
Where is my cloak?—They are all blurred with tears.

ELECTRA.

What ails thine eyes, old friend? After these years
Doth my low plight still stir thy memories?
Or think'st thou of Orestes, where he lies
In exile, and my father? Aye, long love
Thou gavest him, and seest the fruit thereof
Wasted, for thee and all who love thee!

OLD MAN.

All
Wasted! And yet 'tis that lost hope withal
I cannot brook. But now I turned aside
To see my master's grave. All, far and wide,
Was silence; so I bent these knees of mine
And wept and poured drink-offerings from the wine
I bear the strangers, and about the stone
Laid myrtle sprays. And, child, I saw thereon
Just at the censer slain, a fleecèd ewe,
Deep black, in sacrifice: the blood was new
About it: and a tress of bright brown hair
Shorn as in mourning, close. Long stood I there
And wondered, of all men what man had gone
In mourning to that grave.—My child, 'tis none
In Argos. Did there come . . . Nay, mark me
now . . .
Thy brother in the dark, last night, to bow
His head before that unadorèd tomb?
O come, and mark the colour of it. Come
And lay thine own hair by that mourner's tress!
A hundred little things make likenesses
In brethren born, and show the father's blood.

ELECTRA (*trying to mask her excitement and resist the contagion of his*).

Old heart, old heart, is this a wise man's mood? . . .
O, not in darkness, not in fear of men,
Shall Argos find him, when he comes again,
Mine own undaunted . . . Nay, and if it were,
What likeness could there be? My brother's hair
Is as a prince's and a rover's, strong
With sunlight and with strife: not like the long
Locks that a woman combs. . . . And many a head
Hath this same semblance, wing for wing, tho' bred
Of blood not ours. . . . 'Tis hopeless. Peace, old man.

OLD MAN.

The footprints! Set thy foot by his, and scan
The track of frame and muscles, how they fit!

ELECTRA.

That ground will take no footprint! All of it
Is bitter stone. . . . It hath? . . . And who hath said
There should be likeness in a brother's tread
And sister's? His is stronger every way.

OLD MAN.

But hast thou nothing . . . ? If he came this day
And sought to show thee, is there no one sign
Whereby to know him? . . . Stay; the robe was thine,
Work of thy loom, wherein I wrapt him o'er
That night, and stole him through the murderers' door.

ELECTRA.

Thou knowest, when Orestes was cast out
I was a child. . . . If I did weave some clout
Of raiment, would he keep the vesture now
He wore in childhood? Should my weaving grow
As his limbs grew? . . . 'Tis lost long since. No more!
O, either 'twas some stranger passed, and shore
His locks for very ruth before that tomb:
Or, if he found perchance, to seek his home,
Some spy . . .

OLD MAN.

The strangers! Where are they? I fain
Would see them, aye, and bid them answer plain . . .

ELECTRA.

Here at the door! How swift upon the thought!

Enter ORESTES *and* PYLADES.

OLD MAN.

High-born: albeit for that I trust them not.
The highest oft are false. . . . Howe'er it be,
[*Approaching them.*
I bid the strangers hail!

ORESTES.

All hail to thee,
Greybeard!—Prithee, what man of all the King
Trusted of old, is now this broken thing?

ELECTRA.

'Tis he that trained my father's boyhood.

ORESTES.

How?
And stole from death thy brother? Sayest thou?

ELECTRA.

This man was his deliverer, if it be
Deliverance.

ORESTES.

How his old eye pierceth me,
As one that testeth silver and alloy!
Sees he some likeness here?

ELECTRA.

Perchance 'tis joy,
To see Orestes' comrade, that he feels.

ORESTES.

None dearer.—But what ails the man? He reels
Dizzily back.

ELECTRA.

I marvel. I can say
No more.

OLD MAN (*in a broken voice*).

Electra, mistress, daughter, pray!
Pray unto God!

ELECTRA.

Of all the things I crave,
The thousand things, or all that others have,
What should I pray for?

OLD MAN.

Pray thine arms may hold
At last this treasure-dream of more than gold
God shows us!

ELECTRA.

God, I pray thee! . . . Wouldst thou more?

OLD MAN.

Gaze now upon this man, and bow before
Thy dearest upon earth!

ELECTRA.

I gaze on thee!
O, hath time made thee mad?

OLD MAN.

Mad, that I see
Thy brother?

ELECTRA.

My . . . I know not what thou say'st:
I looked not for it . . .

OLD MAN.

I tell thee, here confessed
Standeth Orestes, Agamemnon's son!

ELECTRA.

A sign before I trust thee! O, but one!
How dost thou know . . .?

OLD MAN.

There, by his brow, I see
The scar he made, that day he ran with thee
Chasing thy fawn, and fell.

ELECTRA (*in a dull voice*).

A scar? 'Tis so.
I see a scar.

OLD MAN.

And fearest still to throw
Thine arms round him thou lovest?

ELECTRA.

O, no more!
Thy sign hath conquered me. . . . (*throwing herself into* ORESTES' *arms*). At last, at last!
Thy face like light! And do I hold thee fast,
Unhoped for?

ORESTES.

Yea, at last! And I hold thee.

ELECTRA.

I never knew . . .

ORESTES.

I dreamed not.

ELECTRA.

Is it he,
Orestes?

ORESTES.

Thy defender, yea, alone
To fight the world! Lo, this day have I thrown
A net, which once unbroken from the sea
Drawn home, shall . . . O, and it must surely be!
Else men shall know there is no God, no light
In Heaven, if wrong to the end shall conquer right.

CHORUS.

Comest thou, comest thou now,
Chained by the years and slow,
O Day long sought?
A light on the mountains cold
Is lit, yea, a fire burneth.
'Tis the light of one that turneth
From roamings manifold,
Back out of exile old
To the house that knew him not.

Some spirit hath turned our way,
Victory visible,
Walking at thy right hand,
Belovèd; O lift this day
Thine arms, thy voice, as a spell;
And pray for thy brother, pray,
Threading the perilous land,
That all be well!

ORESTES.

Enough; this dear delight is mine at last
Of thine embracing; and the hour comes fast

When we shall stand again as now we stand,
And stint not.—Stay, Old Man : thou, being at hand
At the edge of time, advise me, by what way
Best to requite my father's murderers. Say,
Have I in Argos any still to trust ;
Or is the love, once borne me, trod in dust,
Even as my fortunes are ? Whom shall I seek ?
By day or night ? And whither turn, to wreak
My will on them that hate us ? Say.

OLD MAN.

My son,
In thine adversity, there is not one
Will call thee friend. Nay, that were treasure-trove,
A friend to share, not faltering from love,
Fair days and foul the same. Thy name is gone
Forth to all Argos, as a thing o'erthrown
And dead. Thou hast not left one spark to glow
With hope in one friend's heart ! Hear all, and know :
Thou hast God's fortune and thine own right hand,
Naught else, to conquer back thy fatherland.

ORESTES.

The deed, the deed ! What must we do ?

OLD MAN.

Strike down
Aegisthus . . . and thy mother.

ORESTES.

'Tis the crown
My race is run for. But how find him ?

OLD MAN.

Not
Within the city walls, however hot
Thy spirit.

ORESTES.

Ha! With watchers doth he go
Begirt, and mailèd pikemen?

OLD MAN.

Even so:
He lives in fear of thee, and night nor day
Hath slumber.

ORESTES.

That way blocked!—'Tis thine to say
What next remains.

OLD MAN.

I will; and thou give ear.
A thought has found me!

ORESTES.

All good thoughts be near,
For thee to speak and me to understand!

OLD MAN.

But now I saw Aegisthus, close at hand
As here I journeyed.

ORESTES.

That good word shall trace
My path for me! Thou saw'st him? In what place?

OLD MAN.

Out on the pastures where his horses stray.

ORESTES.

What did he there so far?—A gleam of day
Crosseth our darkness.

OLD MAN.

'Twas a feast, methought,
Of worship to the wild-wood nymphs he wrought.

ORESTES.

The watchers of men's birth? Is there a son
New born to him, or doth he pray for one
That cometh? [*Movement of* ELECTRA.

OLD MAN.

More I know not; he had there
A wreathèd ox, as for some weighty prayer.

ORESTES.

What force was with him? Not his serfs alone?

OLD MAN.

No Argive lord was there; none but his own
Household.

ORESTES.

Not any that might know my race,
Or guess?

OLD MAN.

Thralls, thralls; who ne'er have seen thy face.

ORESTES.

Once I prevail, the thralls will welcome me!

OLD MAN.

The slaves' way, that; and no ill thing for thee!

ORESTES.

How can I once come near him?

OLD MAN.

Walk thy ways
Hard by, where he may see thee, ere he slays
His sacrifice.

ORESTES.

How? Is the road so nigh?

OLD MAN.

He cannot choose but see thee, passing by,
And bid thee stay to share the beast they kill.

ORESTES.

A bitter fellow-feaster, if God will!

OLD MAN.

And then . . . then swift be heart and brain, to see
God's chances!

ORESTES.

Aye. Well hast thou counselled me.
But . . . where is she?

OLD MAN.

In Argos now, I guess;
But goes to join her husband, ere the press
Of the feast.

ORESTES.

Why goeth not my mother straight
Forth at her husband's side?

OLD MAN.

She fain will wait
Until the gathered country-folk be gone.

ORESTES.

Enough! She knows what eyes are turned upon
Her passings in the land!

OLD MAN.

Aye, all men hate
The unholy woman.

ORESTES.

How then can I set
My snare for wife and husband in one breath?

ELECTRA (*coming forward*).

Hold! It is I must work our mother's death.

ORESTES.

If that be done, I think the other deed
Fortune will guide.

ELECTRA.

This man must help our need,
One friend alone for both.

OLD MAN.

He will, he will!
Speak on. What cunning hast thou found to fill
Thy purpose?

ELECTRA.

Get thee forth, Old Man, and quick
Tell Clytemnestra . . . tell her I lie sick,
New-mothered of a man-child.

OLD MAN.

Thou hast borne
A son! But when?

ELECTRA.

Let this be the tenth morn.
Till then a mother stays in sanctity,
Unseen.

OLD MAN.

And if I tell her, where shall be
The death in this?

ELECTRA.

That word let her but hear,
Straight she will seek me out!

OLD MAN.

The queen! What care
Hath she for thee, or pain of thine?

ELECTRA.

She will;
And weep my babe's low station!

OLD MAN.

Thou hast skill
To know her, child; say on.

ELECTRA.

But bring her here,
Here to my hand; the rest will come.

OLD MAN.

I swear,
Here at the gate she shall stand palpable!

ELECTRA.

The gate: the gate that leads to me and Hell.

OLD MAN.

Let me but see it, and I die content.

ELECTRA.

First, then, my brother: see his steps be bent . . .

OLD MAN.

Straight yonder, where Aegisthus makes his prayer!

ELECTRA.

Then seek my mother's presence, and declare
My news.

OLD MAN.

Thy very words, child, as tho' spoke
From thine own lips!

ELECTRA.

Brother, thine hour is struck.
Thou standest in the van of war this day.

ORESTES (*rousing himself*).

Aye, I am ready. . . . I will go my way,
If but some man will guide me.

OLD MAN.

Here am I,
To speed thee to the end, right thankfully.

ORESTES (*turning as he goes and raising his hands to heaven*).

Zeus of my sires, Zeus of the lost battle,

ELECTRA.

Have pity; have pity; we have earned it well!

OLD MAN.

Pity these twain, of thine own body sprung!

ELECTRA.

O Queen o'er Argive altars, Hera high,

ORESTES.

Grant us thy strength, if for the right we cry.

OLD MAN.

Strength to these twain, to right their father's wrong!

ELECTRA.

O Earth, deep Earth, to whom I yearn in vain,

ORESTES.

And deeper thou, O father darkly slain,

OLD MAN.

Thy children call, who love thee: hearken thou!

ORESTES.

Girt with thine own dead armies, wake, O wake!

ELECTRA.

With all that died at Ilion for thy sake . . .

OLD MAN.

And hate earth's dark defilers; help us now!

ELECTRA.

Dost hear us yet, O thou in deadly wrong,
Wronged by my mother?

OLD MAN.

Child, we stay too long.
He hears; be sure he hears!

ELECTRA.

And while he hears,
I speak this word for omen in his ears:

"Aegisthus dies, Aegisthus dies." . . . Ah me,
My brother, should it strike not him, but thee,
This wrestling with dark death, behold, I too
Am dead that hour. Think of me as one true,
Not one that lives. I have a sword made keen
For this, and shall strike deep.
I will go in
And make all ready. If there come from thee
Good tidings, all my house for ecstasy
Shall cry; and if we hear that thou art dead,
Then comes the other end!—Lo, I have said.

ORESTES.

I know all, all.

ELECTRA.

Then be a man to-day!

[ORESTES *and the* OLD MAN *depart.*

O Women, let your voices from this fray
Flash me a fiery signal, where I sit,
The sword across my knees, expecting it.
For never, though they kill me, shall they touch
My living limbs!—I know my way thus much.

[*She goes into the house.*

CHORUS.

When white-haired folk are met [*Strophe.*
In Argos about the fold,
A story lingereth yet,
A voice of the mountains old,
That tells of the Lamb of Gold:

A lamb from a mother mild,
But the gold of it curled and beat;
And Pan, who holdeth the keys of the wild,
Bore it to Atreus' feet:
His wild reed pipes he blew,
And the reeds were filled with peace,
And a joy of singing before him flew,
Over the fiery fleece:
And up on the basèd rock,
As a herald cries, cried he:
"Gather ye, gather, O Argive folk,
The King's Sign to see,
The sign of the blest of God,
For he that hath this, hath all!"
Therefore the dance of praise they trod
In the Atreïd brethren's hall.

They opened before men's eyes [*Antistrophe.*
That which was hid before,
The chambers of sacrifice,
The dark of the golden door,
And fires on the altar floor.
And bright was every street,
And the voice of the Muses' tree,
The carven lotus, was lifted sweet;
When afar and suddenly,
Strange songs, and a voice that grew:
"Come to your king, ye folk!
Mine, mine, is the Golden Ewe!"
'Twas dark Thyestes spoke.
For, lo, when the world was still,
With his brother's bride he lay,
And won her to work his will,
And they stole the Lamb away!

Then forth to the folk strode he,
And called them about his fold,
And showed that Sign of the King to be,
The fleece and the horns of gold.

Then, then, the world was changed; [*Strophe* 2.
And the Father, where they ranged,
Shook the golden stars and glowing,
And the great Sun stood deranged
In the glory of his going.

Lo, from that day forth, the East
Bears the sunrise on his breast,
And the flaming Day in heaven
Down the dim ways of the west
Driveth, to be lost at even.

The wet clouds to Northward beat;
And Lord Ammon's desert seat
Crieth from the South, unslaken,
For the dews that once were sweet,
For the rain that God hath taken.

'Tis a children's tale, that old [*Antistrophe* 2.
Shepherds on far hills have told;
And we reck not of their telling,
Deem not that the Sun of gold
Ever turned his fiery dwelling,

Or beat backward in the sky,
For the wrongs of man, the cry
Of his ailing tribes assembled,
To do justly, ere they die!
Once, men told the tale, and trembled;

Fearing God, O Queen: whom thou
Hast forgotten, till thy brow
With old blood is dark and daunted.
And thy brethren, even now,
Walk among the stars, enchanted.

LEADER.

Ha, friends, was that a voice? Or some dream sound
Of voices shaketh me, as underground
God's thunder shuddering? Hark, again, and clear!
It swells upon the wind.—Come forth and hear!
Mistress, Electra!

ELECTRA, *a bare sword in her hand, comes from the house.*

ELECTRA.

Friends! Some news is brought?
How hath the battle ended?

LEADER.

I know naught.
There seemed a cry as of men massacred!

ELECTRA.

I heard it too. Far off, but still I heard.

LEADER.

A distant floating voice . . . Ah, plainer now!

ELECTRA.

Of Argive anguish!—Brother, is it thou?

LEADER.

I know not. Many confused voices cry . . .

ELECTRA.

Death, then for me! That answer bids me die.

LEADER.

Nay, wait! We know not yet thy fortune. Wait!

ELECTRA.

No messenger from him!—Too late, too late!

LEADER.

The message yet will come. 'Tis not a thing
So light of compass, to strike down a king.

Enter a MESSENGER, *running.*

MESSENGER.

Victory, Maids of Argos, Victory!
Orestes . . . all that love him, list to me! . . .
Hath conquered! Agamemnon's murderer lies
Dead! O give thanks to God with happy cries!

ELECTRA.

Who art thou? I mistrust thee. . . . 'Tis a plot!

MESSENGER.

Thy brother's man. Look well. Dost know me not?

ELECTRA.

Friend, friend; my terror made me not to see
Thy visage. Now I know and welcome thee.
How sayst thou? He is dead, verily dead,
My father's murderer . . . ?

MESSENGER.

Shall it be said
Once more? I know again and yet again
Thy heart would hear. Aegisthus lieth slain!

ELECTRA.

Ye Gods! And thou, O Right, that seest all,
Art come at last? . . . But speak; how did he fall?
How swooped the wing of death? . . . I crave to hear.

MESSENGER.

Forth of this hut we set our faces clear
To the world, and struck the open chariot road;
Then on toward the pasture lands, where stood
The great Lord of Mycenae. In a set
Garden beside a channelled rivulet,
Culling a myrtle garland for his brow,
He walked: but hailed us as we passed: "How now,
Strangers! Who are ye? Of what city sprung,
And whither bound?" "Thessalians," answered young
Orestes: "to Alpheüs journeying,
With gifts to Olympian Zeus." Whereat the king:
"This while, beseech you, tarry, and make full
The feast upon my hearth. We slay a bull

Here to the Nymphs. Set forth at break of day
To-morrow, and 'twill cost you no delay.
But come"—and so he gave his hand, and led
The two men in—"I must not be gainsaid;
Come to the house. Ho, there; set close at hand
Vats of pure water, that the guests may stand
At the altar's verge, where falls the holy spray."
Then quickly spake Orestes: "By the way
We cleansed us in a torrent stream. We need
No purifying here. But if indeed
Strangers may share thy worship, here are we
Ready, O King, and swift to follow thee."
So spoke they in the midst. And every thrall
Laid down the spears they served the King withal,
And hied him to the work. Some bore amain
The death-vat, some the corbs of hallowed grain;
Or kindled fire, and round the fire and in
Set cauldrons foaming; and a festal din
Filled all the place. Then took thy mother's lord
The ritual grains, and o'er the altar poured
Its due, and prayed: "O Nymphs of Rock and Mere,
With many a sacrifice for many a year,
May I and she who waits at home for me,
My Tyndarid Queen, adore you. May it be
Peace with us always, even as now; and all
Ill to mine enemies"—meaning withal
Thee and Orestes. Then my master prayed
Against that prayer, but silently, and said
No word, to win once more his fatherland.
Then in the corb Aegisthus set his hand,
Took the straight blade, cut from the proud bull's head
A lock, and laid it where the fire was red;

Then, while the young men held the bull on high,
Slew it with one clean gash; and suddenly
Turned on thy brother: "Stranger, every true
Thessalian, so the story goes, can hew
A bull's limbs clean, and tame a mountain steed.
Take up the steel, and show us if indeed
Rumour speak true." Right swift Orestes took
The Dorian blade, back from his shoulders shook
His broochèd mantle, called on Pylades
To aid him, and waved back the thralls. With ease
Heelwise he held the bull, and with one glide
Bared the white limb; then stripped the mighty hide
From off him, swifter than a runner runs
His furlongs, and laid clean the flank. At once
Aegisthus stooped, and lifted up with care
The ominous parts, and gazed. No lobe was there;
But lo, strange caves of gall, and, darkly raised,
The portal vein boded to him that gazed
Fell visitations. Dark as night his brow
Clouded. Then spake Orestes: "Why art thou
Cast down so sudden?" "Guest," he cried, "there be
Treasons from whence I know not, seeking me.
Of all my foes, 'tis Agamemnon's son;
His hate is on my house, like war." "Have done!"
Orestes cried: "thou fear'st an exile's plot,
Lord of a city? Make thy cold heart hot
With meat.—Ho, fling me a Thessalian steel!
This Dorian is too light. I will unseal
The breast of him." He took the heavier blade,
And clave the bone. And there Aegisthus stayed,
The omens in his hand, dividing slow
This sign from that; till, while his head bent low,

Up with a leap thy brother flashed the sword,
Then down upon his neck, and cleft the cord
Of brain and spine. Shuddering the body stood
One instant in an agony of blood,
And gasped and fell. The henchmen saw, and straight
Flew to their spears, a host of them to set
Against those twain. But there the twain did stand
Unfaltering, each his iron in his hand,
Edge fronting edge. Till "Hold," Orestes calls:
"I come not as in wrath against these walls
And mine own people. One man righteously
I have slain, who slew my father. It is I,
The wronged Orestes! Hold, and smite me not,
Old housefolk of my father!" When they caught
That name, their lances fell. And one old man,
An ancient in the house, drew nigh to scan
His face, and knew him. Then with one accord
They crowned thy brother's temples, and outpoured
Joy and loud songs. And hither now he fares
To show the head, no Gorgon, that he bears,
But that Aegisthus whom thou hatest! Yea,
Blood against blood, his debt is paid this day.

[*He goes off to meet the others*—ELECTRA *stands as though stupefied.*

CHORUS.

Now, now thou shalt dance in our dances,
Beloved, as a fawn in the night!
The wind is astir for the glances
Of thy feet; thou art robed with delight.

He hath conquered, he cometh to free us
With garlands new-won,
More high than the crowns of Alpheüs,
Thine own father's son:
Cry, cry, for the day that is won!

ELECTRA.

O Light of the Sun, O chariot wheels of flame,
O Earth and Night, dead Night without a name
That held me! Now mine eyes are raised to see,
And all the doorways of my soul flung free.
Aegisthus dead! My father's murderer dead!
What have I still of wreathing for the head
Stored in my chambers? Let it come forth now
To bind my brother's and my conqueror's brow.

[*Some garlands are brought out from the house to* ELECTRA.

CHORUS.

Go, gather thy garlands, and lay them
As a crown on his brow, many-tressed,
But our feet shall refrain not nor stay them:
'Tis the joy that the Muses have blest.
For our king is returned as from prison,
The old king, to be master again,
Our beloved in justice re-risen:
With guile he hath slain . . .
But cry, cry in joyance again!

[*There enter from the left* ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *followed by some thralls.*

ELECTRA.

O conqueror, come! The king that trampled Troy
Knoweth his son Orestes. Come in joy,
Brother, and take to bind thy rippling hair
My crowns! . . . O what are crowns, that runners wear
For some vain race? But thou in battle true
Hast felled our foe Aegisthus, him that slew
By craft thy sire and mine. [*She crowns* ORESTES.
And thou no less,
O friend at need, O reared in righteousness,
Take, Pylades, this chaplet from my hand.
'Twas half thy battle. And may ye two stand
Thus alway, victory-crowned, before my face!
[*She crowns* PYLADES.

ORESTES.

Electra, first as workers of this grace
Praise thou the Gods, and after, if thou will,
Praise also me, as chosen to fulfil
God's work and Fate's. — Aye, 'tis no more a dream;
In very deed I come from slaying him.
Thou hast the knowledge clear, but lo, I bring
More also. See himself, dead!
[*Attendants bring in the body of* AEGISTHUS *on a bier.*
Wouldst thou fling
This lord on the rotting earth for beasts to tear?
Or up, where all the vultures of the air
May glut them, pierce and nail him for a sign
Far off? Work all thy will. Now he is thine.

ELECTRA.

It shames me; yet, God knows, I hunger sore—

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou? Speak; the old fear nevermore
Need touch thee.

ELECTRA.

To let loose upon the dead
My hate! Perchance to rouse on mine own head
The sleeping hate of the world?

ORESTES.

No man that lives
Shall scathe thee by one word.

ELECTRA.

Our city gives
Quick blame; and little love have men for me.

ORESTES.

If aught thou hast unsaid, sister, be free
And speak. Between this man and us no bar
Cometh nor stint, but the utter rage of war.

[*She goes and stands over the body. A moment's silence.*

ELECTRA.

Ah me, what have I? What first flood of hate
To loose upon thee? What last curse to sate
My pain, or river of wild words to flow
Bank-high between? . . . Nothing? . . . And yet I know

There hath not passed one sun, but through the long
Cold dawns, over and over, like a song,
I have said them—words held back, O, some day yet
To flash into thy face, would but the fret
Of ancient fear fall loose and let me free.
And free I am, now; and can pay to thee
At last the weary debt.
Oh, thou didst kill
My soul within. Who wrought thee any ill,
That thou shouldst make me fatherless? Aye, me
And this my brother, loveless, solitary?
'Twas thou, didst bend my mother to her shame:
Thy weak hand murdered him who led to fame
The hosts of Hellas—thou, that never crossed
O'erseas to Troy! . . . God help thee, wast thou lost
In blindness, long ago, dreaming, some-wise,
She would be true with thee, whose sin and lies
Thyself had tasted in my father's place?
And then, that thou wert happy, when thy days
Were all one pain? Thou knewest ceaselessly
Her kiss a thing unclean, and she knew thee
A lord so little true, so dearly won!
So lost ye both, being in falseness one,
What fortune else had granted; she thy curse,
Who marred thee as she loved thee, and thou hers . . .
And on thy ways thou heardst men whispering,
"Lo, the Queen's husband yonder"—not "the King."
And then the lie of lies that dimmed thy brow,
Vaunting that by thy gold, thy chattels, Thou
Wert Something; which themselves are nothingness,
Shadows, to clasp a moment ere they cease.
The thing thou art, and not the things thou hast,
Abideth, yea, and bindeth to the last

Thy burden on thee: while all else, ill-won
And sin-companioned, like a flower o'erblown,
Flies on the wind away.
Or didst thou find
In women . . . Women? . . . Nay, peace, peace!
The blind
Could read thee. Cruel wast thou in thine hour,
Lord of a great king's house, and like a tower
Firm in thy beauty.
[*Starting back with a look of loathing.*
Ah, that girl-like face!
God grant, not that, not that, but some plain grace
Of manhood to the man who brings me love:
A father of straight children, that shall move
Swift on the wings of War.
So, get thee gone!
Naught knowing how the great years, rolling on,
Have laid thee bare, and thy long debt full paid.
O vaunt not, if one step be proudly made
In evil, that all Justice is o'ercast:
Vaunt not, ye men of sin, ere at the last
The thin-drawn marge before you glimmereth
Close, and the goal that wheels 'twixt life and death.

LEADER.

Justice is mighty. Passing dark hath been
His sin: and dark the payment of his sin.

ELECTRA (*with a weary sigh, turning from the body*).

Ah me! Go some of you, bear him from sight,
That when my mother come, her eyes may light
On nothing, nothing, till she know the sword . . .
[*The body is borne into the hut.* PYLADES *goes with it.*

ORESTES (*looking along the road*).

Stay, 'tis a new thing! We have still a word
To speak . . .

ELECTRA.

What? Not a rescue from the town
Thou seëst?

ORESTES.

'Tis my mother comes: my own
Mother, that bare me. [*He takes off his crown.*

ELECTRA (*springing, as it were, to life again, and moving where she can see the road*).

Straight into the snare!
Aye, there she cometh.—Welcome in thy rare
Chariot! All welcome in thy brave array!

ORESTES.

What would we with our mother? Didst thou say
Kill her?

ELECTRA (*turning on him*).

What? Is it pity? Dost thou fear
To see thy mother's shape?

ORESTES.

'Twas she that bare
My body into life. She gave me suck.
How can I strike her?

ELECTRA.

Strike her as she struck
Our father!

ORESTES (*to himself, brooding*).

Phoebus, God, was all thy mind
Turned unto darkness?

ELECTRA.

If thy God be blind,
Shalt thou have light?

ORESTES (*as before*).

Thou, thou, didst bid me kill
My mother: which is sin.

ELECTRA.

How brings it ill
To thee, to raise our father from the dust?

ORESTES.

I was a clean man once. Shall I be thrust
From men's sight, blotted with her blood?

ELECTRA.

Thy blot
Is black as death if him thou succour not!

ORESTES.

Who shall do judgment on me, when she dies?

ELECTRA.

Who shall do judgment, if thy father lies
Forgotten?

ORESTES (*turning suddenly to* ELECTRA).

Stay! How if some fiend of Hell,
Hid in God's likeness, spake that oracle?

ELECTRA.

In God's own house? I trow not.

ORESTES.

And I trow
It was an evil charge! [*He moves away from her.*

ELECTRA (*almost despairing*).

To fail me now!
To fail me now! A coward!—O brother, no!

ORESTES.

What shall it be, then? The same stealthy blow . . .

ELECTRA.

That slew our father! Courage! thou hast slain
Aegisthus.

ORESTES.

Aye. So be it.—I have ta'en
A path of many terrors: and shall do
Deeds horrible. 'Tis God will have it so. . . .
Is this the joy of battle, or wild woe?
[*He goes into the house.*

LEADER.

O Queen o'er Argos thronèd high,
O Woman, sister of the twain,
God's Horsemen, stars without a stain,
Whose home is in the deathless sky,
Whose glory in the sea's wild pain,
Toiling to succour men that die:
Long years above us hast thou been,
God-like for gold and marvelled power:
Ah, well may mortal eyes this hour
Observe thy state: All hail, O Queen!

Enter from the right CLYTEMNESTRA *on a chariot, accompanied by richly dressed Handmaidens.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Down from the wain, ye dames of Troy, and hold
Mine arm as I dismount. . . .
[*Answering* ELECTRA's *thought.*
The spoils and gold
Of Ilion I have sent out of my hall
To many shrines. These bondwomen are all
I keep in mine own house . . . Deemst thou the cost
Too rich to pay me for the child I lost—
Fair though they be?

ELECTRA.

Nay, Mother, here am I
Bond likewise, yea, and homeless, to hold high
Thy royal arm!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Child, the war-slaves are here;
Thou needst not toil.

ELECTRA.

What was it but the spear
Of war, drove me forth too? Mine enemies
Have sacked my father's house, and, even as these,
Captives and fatherless, made me their prey.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It was thy father cast his child away,
A child he might have loved! . . . Shall I speak out?
(*Controlling herself*) Nay; when a woman once is caught about
With evil fame, there riseth in her tongue
A bitter spirit—wrong, I know! Yet, wrong
Or right, I charge ye look on the deeds done;
And if ye needs must hate, when all is known,
Hate on! What profits loathing ere ye know?
My father gave me to be his. 'Tis so.
But was it his to kill me, or to kill
The babes I bore? Yet, lo, he tricked my will
With fables of Achilles' love: he bore
To Aulis and the dark ship-clutching shore,
He held above the altar-flame, and smote,
Cool as one reaping, through the strained throat,
My white Iphigenia. . . . Had it been
To save some falling city, leaguered in

With foemen ; to prop up our castle towers,
And rescue other children that were ours,
Giving one life for many, by God's laws
I had forgiven all ! Not so. Because
Helen was wanton, and her master knew
No curb for her : for that, for that, he slew
My daughter !—Even then, with all my wrong,
No wild beast yet was in me. Nay, for long,
I never would have killed him. But he came,
At last, bringing that damsel, with the flame
Of God about her, mad and knowing all :
And set her in my room ; and in one wall
Would hold two queens !—O wild are woman's eyes
And hot her heart. I say not otherwise.
But, being thus wild, if then her master stray
To love far off, and cast his own away,
Shall not her will break prison too, and wend
Somewhere to win some other for a friend ?
And then on us the world's curse waxes strong
In righteousness ! The lords of all the wrong
Must hear no curse !—I slew him. I trod then
The only road : which led me to the men
He hated. Of the friends of Argos whom
Durst I have sought, to aid me to the doom
I craved ?—Speak if thou wouldst, and fear not me,
If yet thou deemst him slain unrighteously.

LEADER.

Thy words be just, yet shame their justice brings ;
A woman true of heart should bear all things
From him she loves. And she who feels it not,
I cannot reason of her, nor speak aught.

ELECTRA.

Remember, mother, thy last word of grace,
Bidding me speak, and fear not, to thy face.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So said I truly, child, and so say still.

ELECTRA.

Wilt softly hear, and after work me ill?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so, not so. I will but pleasure thee.

ELECTRA.

I answer then. And, mother, this shall be
My prayer of opening, where hangs the whole:
Would God that He had made thee clean of soul!
Helen and thou—O, face and form were fair,
Meet for men's praise; but sisters twain ye were,
Both things of naught, a stain on Castor's star.
And Helen slew her honour, borne afar
In wilful ravishment: but thou didst slay
The highest man of the world. And now wilt say
'Twas wrought in justice for thy child laid low
At Aulis? . . . Ah, who knows thee as I know?
Thou, thou, who long ere aught of ill was done
Thy child, when Agamemnon scarce was gone,
Sate at the looking-glass, and tress by tress
Didst comb the twinèd gold in loneliness.
When any wife, her lord being far away,
Toils to be fair, O blot her out that day

As false within! What would she with a cheek
So bright in strange men's eyes, unless she seek
Some treason? None but I, thy child, could so
Watch thee in Hellas: none but I could know
Thy face of gladness when our enemies
Were strong, and the swift cloud upon thine eyes
If Troy seemed falling, all thy soul keen-set
Praying that he might come no more! . . . And yet
It was so easy to be true. A king
Was thine, not feebler, not in anything
Below Aegisthus; one whom Hellas chose
For chief beyond all kings. Aye, and God knows,
How sweet a name in Greece, after the sin
Thy sister wrought, lay in thy ways to win.
Ill deeds make fair ones shine, and turn thereto
Men's eyes.—Enough: but say he wronged thee; slew
By craft thy child:—what wrong had I done, what
The babe Orestes? Why didst render not
Back unto us, the children of the dead,
Our father's portion? Must thou heap thy bed
With gold of murdered men, to buy to thee
Thy strange man's arms? Justice! Why is not he
Who cast Orestes out, cast out again?
Not slain for me whom doubly he hath slain,
In living death, more bitter than of old
My sister's? Nay, when all the tale is told
Of blood for blood, what murder shall we make,
I and Orestes, for our father's sake?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, child; I know thy heart, from long ago.
Thou hast alway loved him best. 'Tis oft-time so:
One is her father's daughter, and one hot

To bear her mother's part. I blame thee not . . .
Yet think not I am happy, child ; nor flown
With pride now, in the deeds my hand hath done . . .
[*Seeing* ELECTRA *unsympathetic, she checks herself.*
But thou art all untended, comfortless
Of body and wild of raiment ; and thy stress
Of travail scarce yet ended ! . . . Woe is me !
'Tis all as I have willed it. Bitterly
I wrought against him, to the last blind deep
Of bitterness. . . . Woe's me !

ELECTRA.

Fair days to weep,
When help is not ! Or stay : though he lie cold
Long since, there lives another of thy fold
Far off ; there might be pity for thy son ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I dare not ! . . . Yes, I fear him. 'Tis mine own
Life, and not his, comes first. And rumour saith
His heart yet burneth for his father's death.

ELECTRA.

Why dost thou keep thine husband ever hot
Against me ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis his mood. And thou art not
So gentle, child !

ELECTRA.

My spirit is too sore !
Howbeit, from this day I will no more
Hate him.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*with a flash of hope*).

O daughter!—Then, indeed, shall he,
I promise, never more be harsh to thee!

ELECTRA.

He lieth in my house, as 'twere his own.
'Tis that hath made him proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, art thou flown
To strife again so quick, child?

ELECTRA.

Well; I say
No more; long have I feared him, and alway
Shall fear him, even as now!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, daughter, peace!
It bringeth little profit, speech like this . . .
Why didst thou call me hither?

ELECTRA.

It reached thee,
My word that a man-child is born to me?
Do thou make offering for me—for the rite
I know not—as is meet on the tenth night.
I cannot; I have borne no child till now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Who tended thee? 'Tis she should make the vow.

ELECTRA.

None tended me. Alone I bare my child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, is thy cot so friendless? And this wild
So far from aid?

ELECTRA.

Who seeks for friendship sake
A beggar's house?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will go in, and make
Due worship for thy child, the Peace-bringer.
To all thy need I would be minister.
Then to my lord, where by the meadow side
He prays the woodland nymphs.
Ye handmaids, guide
My chariot to the stall, and when ye guess
The rite draws near its end, in readiness
Be here again. Then to my lord! . . . I owe
My lord this gladness, too.

[*The Attendants depart;* CLYTEMNESTRA, *left alone, proceeds to enter the house.*

ELECTRA.

Welcome below
My narrow roof! But have a care withal,
A grime of smoke lies deep upon the wall.
Soil not thy robe! . . .

Not far now shall it be,
The sacrifice God asks of me and thee.
The bread of Death is broken, and the knife
Lifted again that drank the Wild Bull's life:
And on his breast . . . Ha, Mother, hast slept well
Aforetime? Thou shalt lie with him in Hell.
That grace I give to cheer thee on thy road;
Give thou to me—peace from my father's blood!

[*She follows her mother into the house.*

CHORUS.

Lo, the returns of wrong.
The wind as a changèd thing
Whispereth overhead
Of one that of old lay dead
In the water lapping long:
My King, O my King!

A cry in the rafters then
Rang, and the marble dome:
"Mercy of God, not thou,
"Woman! To slay me now,
"After the harvests ten
"Now, at the last, come home!"

O Fate shall turn as the tide,
Turn, with a doom of tears
For the flying heart too fond;
A doom for the broken bond.
She hailed him there in his pride,
Home from the perilous years,

In the heart of his wallèd lands,
In the Giants' cloud-capt ring;
Herself, none other, laid
The hone to the axe's blade;
She lifted it in her hands,
The woman, and slew her king.

Woe upon spouse and spouse,
Whatso of evil sway
Held her in that distress!
Even as a lioness
Breaketh the woodland boughs
Starving, she wrought her way.

VOICE OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Children, Children; in the name of God,
Slay not your mother!

A WOMAN.

Did ye hear a cry
Under the rafters?

ANOTHER.

I weep too, yea, I;
Down on the mother's heart the child hath trod!

[*A death-cry from within.*

ANOTHER.

God bringeth Justice in his own slow tide.
Aye, cruel is thy doom; but thy deeds done
Evil, thou piteous woman, and on one
Whose sleep was by thy side!

[*The door bursts open, and* ORESTES *and* ELECTRA *come forth in disorder. Attendants bring out the bodies of* CLYTEMNESTRA *and* AEGISTHUS.

LEADER.

Lo, yonder, in their mother's new-spilt gore
Red-garmented and ghastly, from the door
They reel. . . . O horrible! Was it agony
Like this, she boded in her last wild cry?
There lives no seed of man calamitous,
Nor hath lived, like this seed of Tantalus.

ORESTES.

O Dark of the Earth, O God,
Thou to whom all is plain;
Look on my sin, my blood,
This horror of dead things twain:
Gathered as one they lie
Slain; and the slayer was I,
I, to pay for my pain!

ELECTRA.

Let tear rain upon tear,
Brother: but mine is the blame.
A fire stood over her,
And out of the fire I came,
I, in my misery. . . .
And I was the child at her knee.
'Mother' I named her name.

CHORUS.

Alas for Fate, for the Fate of thee,
O Mother, Mother of Misery:
And Misery, lo, hath turned again,

To slay thee, Misery and more,
Even in the fruit thy body bore.
Yet hast thou Justice, Justice plain,
For a sire's blood spilt of yore!

ORESTES.

Apollo, alas for the hymn
Thou sangest, as hope in mine ear!
The Song was of Justice dim,
But the Deed is anguish clear;
And the Gift, long nights of fear,
Of blood and of wandering,
Where cometh no Greek thing,
Nor sight, nor sound on the air.
Yea, and beyond, beyond,
Roaming—what rest is there?
Who shall break bread with me?
Who, that is clean, shall see
And hate not the blood-red hand,
His mother's murderer?

ELECTRA.

And I? What clime shall hold
My evil, or roof it above?
I cried for dancing of old,
I cried in my heart for love:
What dancing waiteth me now?
What love that shall kiss my brow
Nor blench at the brand thereof?

CHORUS.

Back, back, in the wind and rain
Thy driven spirit wheeleth again.

Now is thine heart made clean within
That was dark of old and murder-fraught.
But, lo, thy brother; what hast thou wrought . . .
Yea, though I love thee . . . what woe, what sin,
On him, who willed it not!

ORESTES.

Saw'st thou her raiment there,
Sister, there in the blood?
She drew it back as she stood,
She opened her bosom bare,
She bent her knees to the earth,
The knees that bent in my birth . . .
And I . . . Oh, her hair, her hair . . .
[*He breaks into inarticulate weeping*

CHORUS.

Oh, thou didst walk in agony,
Hearing thy mother's cry, the cry
Of wordless wailing, well know I.

ELECTRA.

She stretched her hand to my cheek,
And there brake from her lips a moan;
'Mercy, my child, my own!'
Her hand clung to my cheek;
Clung, and my arm was weak;
And the sword fell and was gone.

CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, could thine eye
Look on the blood, and see her lie,
Thy mother, where she turned to die?

ORESTES.

I lifted over mine eyes
My mantle: blinded I smote,
As one smiteth a sacrifice;
And the sword found her throat.

ELECTRA.

I gave thee the sign and the word;
I touched with mine hand thy sword.

LEADER.

Dire is the grief ye have wrought.

ORESTES.

Sister, touch her again:
Oh, veil the body of her;
Shed on her raiment fair,
And close that death-red stain.
—Mother! And didst thou bear,
Bear in thy bitter pain,
To life, thy murderer?
[*The two kneel over the body of* CLYTEMNESTRA,
and cover her with raiment.

ELECTRA.

On her that I loved of yore,
Robe upon robe I cast:
On her that I hated sore.

CHORUS.

O House that hath hated sore,
Behold thy peace at the last!

LEADER.

Ha, see: above the roof-tree high
There shineth . . . Is some spirit there
Of earth or heaven? That thin air
Was never trod by things that die!
What bodes it now that forth they fare,
To men revealèd visibly?

[*There appears in the air a vision of* CASTOR *and* POLYDEUCES. *The mortals kneel or veil their faces.*

CASTOR.

Thou Agamemnon's Son, give ear! 'Tis we,
Castor and Polydeuces, call to thee,
God's Horsemen and thy mother's brethren twain.
An Argive ship, spent with the toiling main,
We bore but now to peace, and, here withal
Being come, have seen thy mother's bloody fall,
Our sister's. Righteous is her doom this day,
But not thy deed. And Phoebus, Phoebus . . .
Nay;
He is my lord; therefore I hold my peace.
Yet though in light he dwell, no light was this
He showed to thee, but darkness! Which do thou
Endure, as man must, chafing not. And now
Fare forth where Zeus and Fate have laid thy life.
The maid Electra thou shalt give for wife
To Pylades; then turn thy head and flee
From Argos' land. 'Tis never more for thee
To tread this earth where thy dead mother lies.
And, lo, in the air her Spirits, bloodhound eyes,

Most horrible yet Godlike, hard at heel
Following shall scourge thee as a burning wheel,
Speed-maddened. Seek thou straight Athena's land,
And round her awful image clasp thine hand,
Praying: and she will fence them back, though hot
With flickering serpents, that they touch thee not,
Holding above thy brow her gorgon shield.
There is a hill in Athens, Ares' field,
Where first for that first death by Ares done
On Halirrhothius, Poseidon's son,
Who wronged his daughter, the great Gods of yore
Held judgment: and true judgments evermore
Flow from that Hill, trusted of man and God.
There shalt thou stand arraignèd of this blood;
And of those judges half shall lay on thee
Death, and half pardon; so shalt thou go free.
For Phoebus in that hour, who bade thee shed
Thy mother's blood, shall take on his own head
The stain thereof. And ever from that strife
The law shall hold, that when, for death or life
Of one pursued, men's voices equal stand,
Then Mercy conquereth.—But for thee, the band
Of Spirits dread, down, down, in very wrath,
Shall sink beside that Hill, making their path
Through a dim chasm, the which shall aye be trod
By reverent feet, where men may speak with God.
But thou forgotten and far off shalt dwell,
By great Alpheüs' waters, in a dell
Of Arcady, where that gray Wolf-God's wall
Stands holy. And thy dwelling men shall call
Orestes' Town. So much to thee be spoke.
But this dead man, Aegisthus, all the folk

Shall bear to burial in a high green grave
Of Argos. For thy mother, she shall have
Her tomb from Menelaus, who hath come
This day, at last, to Argos, bearing home
Helen. From Egypt comes she, and the hall
Of Proteus, and in Troy hath ne'er at all
Set foot. 'Twas but a wraith of Helen, sent
By Zeus, to make much wrath and ravishment.
So forth for home, bearing the virgin bride,
Let Pylades make speed, and lead beside
Thy once-named brother, and with golden store
Stablish his house far off on Phocis' shore.
Up, gird thee now to the steep Isthmian way,
Seeking Athena's blessèd rock; one day,
Thy doom of blood fulfilled and this long stress
Of penance past, thou shalt have happiness.

LEADER (*looking up*).

Is it for us, O Seed of Zeus,
To speak and hear your words again?

CASTOR. Speak: of this blood ye bear no stain.

ELECTRA. I also, sons of Tyndareus,

My kinsmen; may my word be said?

CASTOR. Speak: on Apollo's head we lay
The bloody doings of this day.

LEADER. Ye Gods, ye brethren of the dead,

Why held ye not the deathly herd
Of Kêres back from off this home?

CASTOR. There came but that which needs must come
By ancient Fate and that dark word

That rang from Phoebus in his mood.

ELECTRA. And what should Phoebus seek with me,
Or all God's oracles that be,
That I must bear my mother's blood?

CASTOR. Thy hand was as thy brother's hand,
Thy doom shall be as his. One stain,
From dim forefathers on the twain
Lighting, hath sapped your hearts as sand.

ORESTES (*who has never raised his head, nor spoken to the Gods*). After so long, sister, to see
And hold thee, and then part, then part,
By all that chained thee to my heart
Forsaken, and forsaking thee!

CASTOR. Husband and house are hers. She bears
No bitter judgment, save to go
Exiled from Argos.

ELECTRA. And what woe,
What tears are like an exile's tears?

ORESTES. Exiled and more am I; impure,
A murderer in a stranger's hand!

CASTOR. Fear not. There dwells in Pallas' land
All holiness. Till then endure!

[ORESTES *and* ELECTRA *embrace*

ORESTES. Aye, closer; clasp my body well,
And let thy sorrow loose, and shed,
As o'er the grave of one new dead,
Dead evermore, thy last farewell!

[*A sound of weeping.*

F

CASTOR. Alas, what would ye? For that cry
Ourselves and all the sons of heaven
Have pity. Yea, our peace is riven
By the strange pain of these that die.

ORESTES. No more to see thee! ELECTRA. Nor thy breath
Be near my face! ORESTES. Ah, so it ends.

ELECTRA. Farewell, dear Argos. All ye friends,
Farewell! ORESTES. O faithful unto death,

Thou goest? ELECTRA. Aye, I pass from you,
Soft-eyed at last. ORESTES. Go, Pylades,
And God go with you! Wed in peace
My tall Electra, and be true.
[ELECTRA *and* PYLADES *depart to the left.*

CASTOR.

Their troth shall fill their hearts.—But on:
Dread feet are near thee, hounds of prey,
Snake-handed, midnight-visaged, yea,
And bitter pains their fruit! Begone!
[ORESTES *departs to the right.*

But hark, the far Sicilian sea
Calls, and a noise of men and ships
That labour sunken to the lips
In bitter billows; forth go we,

Through the long leagues of fiery blue,
With saving; not to souls unshriven;
But whoso in his life hath striven
To love things holy and be true,

Through toil and storm we guard him; we
Save, and he shall not die!—Therefore,
O praise the lying man no more,
Nor with oath-breakers sail the sea:
Farewell, ye walkers on the shore
Of death! A God hath counselled ye.
[CASTOR *and* POLYDEUCES *disappear.*

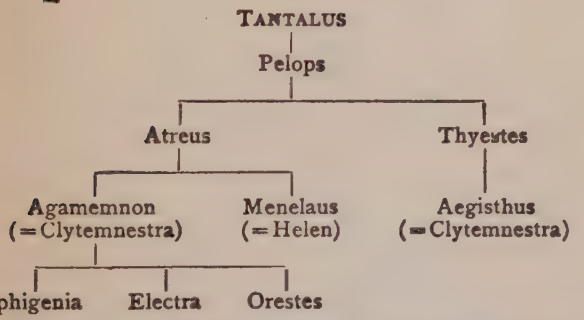
CHORUS.

Farewell, farewell!—But he who can so fare,
And stumbleth not on mischief anywhere,
Blessèd on earth is he!

NOTES TO THE ELECTRA

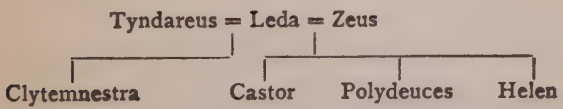
THE chief characters in the play belong to one family, as is shown by the two genealogies:—

I.



(Also, a sister of Agamemnon, name variously given, married Strophios, and was the mother of Pylades.)

II.



P. 1, l. 10, Son of his father's foe.]—Both foe and brother. Atreus and Thyestes became enemies after the theft of the Golden Lamb. See pp. 47 ff.

P. 2, l. 34, Must wed with me.]—In Aeschylus and Sophocles Electra is unmarried. This story of her peasant husband is found only in Euripides, but is

not likely to have been wantonly invented by him. It was no doubt an existing legend—an ἀν λόγος, to use the phrase attributed to Euripides in the *Frogs* (l. 1052). He may have chosen to adopt it for several reasons. First, to marry Electra to a peasant was a likely step for Aegisthus to take, since any child born to her afterwards would bear a stigma, calculated to damage him fatally as a pretender to the throne. Again, it seemed to explain the name "A-lektra" (as if from λεκτρὸν, "bed;" cf. Schol. *Orestes*, 71, Soph. *El.* 962, *Ant.* 917) more pointedly than the commoner version. And it helps in the working out of Electra's character (cf. pp. 17, 22, &c.). Also it gives an opportunity of introducing the fine character of the peasant. He is an *Αὐτουργός*, literally "self-worker," a man who works his own land, far from the city, neither a slave nor a slave-master; "the men," as Euripides says in the *Orestes* (920), "who alone save a nation." (Cf. *Bac.*, p. 115 foot, and below, p. 26, ll. 367–390.) As Euripides became more and more alienated from the town democracy he tended, like Tolstoy and others, to idealise the workers of the soil.

P. 6, l. 62, Children to our enemy.]—Cf. 626. Soph. *El.* 589. They do not seem to be in existence at the time of the play.

Pp. 5–6.]—Electra's first two speeches are admirable as expositions of her character—the morbid nursing of hatred as a duty, the deliberate posing, the impulsiveness, the quick response to kindness.

P. 7, l. 82, Pylades.]—Pylades is a *persona muta* both here and in Sophocles' *Electra*, a fixed traditional figure, possessing no quality but devotion to Orestes. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* he speaks only once, with tremendous effect, at the crisis of the play, to rebuke Orestes when his heart fails him. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, however, and still more in the *Orestes*, he is a fully studied character.

P. 10, l. 151, A swan crying alone.]—Cf. *Bacchae*,

p. 152, "As yearns the milk-white swan when old swans die."

P. 11, ll. 169 ff., The Watcher hath cried this day.]—Hera was an old Pelasgian goddess, whose worship was kept in part a mystery from the invading Achaeans or Dorians. There seems to have been a priest born "of the ancient folk," *i.e.*, a Pelasgian or aboriginal Mycenaean, who, by some secret lore—probably some ancient and superseded method of calculating the year—knew when Hera's festival was due, and walked round the country three days beforehand to announce it. He drank "the milk of the flock" and avoided wine, either from some religious taboo, or because he represented the religion of the milk-drinking mountain shepherds.

P. 13, ll. 220 ff.]—Observe Electra's cowardice when surprised; contrast her courage, p. 47, when sending Orestes off, and again her quick drop to despair when the news does not come soon enough.

P. 16, ll. 247 ff., I am a wife. . . . O better dead !]—Rather ungenerous, when compared with her words on p. 6. (Cf. also her words on pp. 24 and 26.) But she feels this herself, almost immediately. Orestes naturally takes her to mean that her husband is one of Aegisthus' friends. This would have ruined his plot. (Cf. above, p. 8, l. 98.)

P. 22, l. 312, Castor.]—I know no other mention of Electra's betrothal to Castor. He was her kinsman: see below on l. 990.

Pp. 22–23, ll. 300–337.]—In this wonderful outbreak, observe the mixture of all sorts of personal resentments and jealousies with the devotion of the lonely woman to her father and her brother. "So men say," is an interesting touch; perhaps conscience tells her midway that she does not quite believe what she is saying. So is the self-conscious recognition of her "bitter burning brain" that interprets all things in a sort of distortion.—Observe, too, how instinctively

she turns to the peasant for sympathy in the strain of her emotion. It is his entrance, perhaps, which prevents Orestes from being swept away and revealing himself. The peasant's courage towards two armed men is striking, as well as his courtesy and his sanity. He is the one character in the play not somehow tainted with blood-madness.

P. 27, ll. 403, 409.]—Why does Electra send her husband to the Old Man? Not, I think, really for want of the food. It would have been easier to borrow (p. 12, l. 191) from the Chorus; and, besides, what the peasant says is no doubt true, that, if she liked, she could find "many a pleasant thing" in the house. I think she sends for the Old Man because he is the only person who would know Orestes (p. 21, l. 285). She is already, like the Leader (p. 26, l. 401), excited by hopes which she will not confess. This reading makes the next scene clearer also.

Pp. 28–30, ll. 432–487, O for the Ships of Troy.]—The two main Choric songs of this play are markedly what Aristotle calls ἐμβόλιμα, "things thrown in." They have no effect upon the action, and form little more than musical "relief." Not that they are positively irrelevant. Agamemnon is in our minds all through the play, and Agamemnon's glory is of course enhanced by the mention of Troy and the praises of his subordinate king, Achilles.

Thetis, the Nereid, or sea-maiden, was won to wife by Peleus. (He wrestled with her on the seashore, and never loosed hold, though she turned into divers strange beings—a lion, and fire, and water, and sea-beasts.) She bore him Achilles, and then, unable permanently to live with a mortal, went back beneath the sea. When Achilles was about to sail to Troy, she and her sister Nereids brought him divine armour, and guided his ships across the Aegean. The designs on Achilles' armour, as on Heracles' shield, form a fairly common topic of poetry.

The descriptions of the designs are mostly clear. Perseus with the Gorgon's head, guided by Hermês; the Sun on a winged chariot, and stars about him; two Sphinxes, holding as victims the men who had failed to answer the riddles which they sang; and, on the breastplate, the Chimaera attacking Bellerophon's winged horse, Pêgasus. The name Pêgasus suggested to a Greek πηγή, "fountain;" and the great spring of Pirênê, near Corinth, was made by Pêgasus stamping on the rock.

Pp. 30–47.]—The Old Man, like other old family servants in Euripides—the extreme case is in the *Ion*—is absolutely and even morbidly devoted to his masters. Delightful in this first scene, he becomes a little horrible in the next, where they plot the murders; not only ferocious himself, but, what seems worse, inclined to pet and enjoy the bloodthirstiness of his "little mistress."

Pp. 30–33, ll. 510–545.]—The Signs of Orestes. This scene, I think, has been greatly misunderstood by critics. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, which deals with the same subject as the *Electra*, the scene is at Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes lays his tress there in the prologue. Electra comes bringing libations, sees the hair, compares it with her own, finds that it is similar "wing for wing" (ὁμόπτερος—the same word as here), and guesses that it belongs to Orestes. She then measures the footprints, and finds one that is like her own, one not; evidently Orestes and a fellow-traveller! Orestes enters and announces himself; she refuses to believe, until he shows her a "woven thing," perhaps the robe which he is wearing, which she recognises as the work of her own hand.

The same signs, described in one case by the same peculiar word, occur here. The Old Man mentions one after the other, and Electra refutes or rejects them. It has been thought therefore that

this scene was meant as an attack—a very weak and undignified attack—on Euripides' great master. No parallel for such an artistically ruinous proceeding is quoted from any Greek tragedy. And, apart from the improbability *à priori*, I do not think it even possible to read the scene in this sense. To my mind, Electra here rejects the signs not from reason, but from a sort of nervous terror. She dares not believe that Orestes has come; because, if it prove otherwise, the disappointment will be so terrible. As to both signs, the lock of hair and the footprints, her arguments may be good; but observe that she is afraid to make the comparison at all. And as to the footprint, she says there cannot be one, when the Old Man has just seen it! And, anyhow, she will not go to see it! Similarly as to the robe, she does her best to deny that she ever wove it, though she and the Old Man both remember it perfectly. She is fighting tremulously, with all her flagging strength, against the thing she longs for. The whole point of the scene requires that one ray of hope after another should be shown to Electra, and that she should passionately, blindly, reject them all. That is what Euripides wanted the signs for.

But why, it may be asked, did he adopt Aeschylus' signs, and even his peculiar word? Because, whether invented by Aeschylus or not, these signs were a canonical part of the story by the time Euripides wrote. Every one who knew the story of Orestes' return at all, knew of the hair and the footprint. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* (534 ff.) uses them proverbially, when he speaks of his comedy "recognising its brother's tress." It would have been frivolous to invent new ones. As a matter of fact, it seems probable that the signs are older than Aeschylus; neither they nor the word ὁμόπτερος particularly suit Aeschylus' purpose. (Cf. Dr. Verrall's introduction to

the *Libation-Bearers*.) They probably come from the old lyric poet, Stesichorus.

P. 43, l. 652, New-mothered of a Man-Child.]—Her true Man-Child, the Avenger whom they had sought to rob her of! This pitiless plan was suggested apparently by the sacrifice to the Nymphs (p. 40). "Weep my babe's low station" is of course ironical. The babe would set a seal on Electra's degradation to the peasant class, and so end the blood-feud, as far as she was concerned. Clytemnestra, longing for peace, must rejoice in Electra's degradation. Yet she has motherly feelings too, and in fact hardly knows what to think or do till she can consult Aegisthus (p. 71). Electra, it would seem, actually calculates upon these feelings, while despising them.

P. 45, l. 669, If but some man will guide me.]—A suggestion of the irresolution or melancholia that beset Orestes afterwards, alternating with furious action. (Cf. Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, Euripides' *Andromache* and *Orestes*.)

P. 45, l. 671, Zeus of my sires, &c.]—In this invocation, short and comparatively unmoving, one can see perhaps an effect of Aeschylus' play. In the *Libation-Bearers* the invocation of Agamemnon comprises 200 lines of extraordinarily eloquent poetry.

P. 47 ff., ll. 699 ff.]—The Golden Lamb. The theft of the Golden Lamb is treated as a story of the First Sin, after which all the world was changed and became the poor place that it now is. It was at least the First Sin in the blood-feud of this drama.

The story is not explicitly told. Apparently the magic lamb was brought by Pan from the gods, and given to Atreus as a special grace and a sign that he was the true king. His younger brother, Thyestes, helped by Atreus' wife, stole it and claimed to be king himself. So good was turned into evil, and love into hatred, and the stars shaken in their courses.

[It is rather curious that the Lamb should have such a special effect upon the heavens and the weather. It is the same in Plato (*Polit.* 268 ff.), and more definitely so in the treatise *De Astrologia*, attributed to Lucian, which says that the Golden Lamb is the constellation Aries, "The Ram." Hugo Winckler (*Weltanschauung des alten Orients*, pp. 30, 31) suggests that the story is a piece of Babylonian astronomy misunderstood. It seems that the vernal equinox, which is now moving from the Ram into the Fish, was in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. moving from the Bull into the Ram. Now the Bull, Marduk, was the special god of Babylon, and the time when he yielded his place to the Ram was also, as a matter of fact, the time of the decline of Babylon. The gradual advance of the Ram not only upset the calendar, and made all the seasons wrong; but seemed, since it coincided with the fall of the Great City, to upset the world in general! Of course Euripides would know nothing of this. He was apparently attracted to the Golden Lamb merely by the quaint beauty of the story.]

P. 50, l. 746, Thy brethren even now.]—Castor and Polydeuces, who were received into the stars after their death. See below, on l. 990.

P. 51, l. 757, That answer bids me die.]—Why? Because Orestes, if he won at all, would win by a surprise attack, and would send news instantly. A prolonged conflict, without a message, would mean that Orestes and Pylades were being overpowered. Of course she is wildly impatient.

P. 51, l. 765, Who art thou? I mistrust thee.]—Just as she mistrusted the Old Man's signs. See above, p. 89.

P. 52 ff., ll. 774 ff.]—Messenger's Speech. This speech, though swift and vivid, is less moving and also less sympathetic than most of the Messengers' Speeches. Less moving, because the slaying of

Aegisthus has little moral interest; it is merely a daring and dangerous exploit. Less sympathetic, because even here, in the first and comparatively blameless step of the blood-vengeance, Euripides makes us feel the treacherous side of it. A δολοφονία, a "slaying by guile," even at its best, remains rather an ugly thing.

P. 53, l. 793, Then quickly spake Orestes.]—If Orestes had washed with Aegisthus, he would have become his *xenos*, or guest, as much as if he had eaten his bread and salt. In that case the slaying would have been definitely a crime, a dishonourable act. Also, Aegisthus would have had the right to ask his name.—The unsuspiciousness of Aegisthus is partly natural; it was not thus, alone and unarmed, that he expected Orestes to stand before him. Partly it seems like a heaven-sent blindness. Even the omens do not warn him, though no doubt in a moment more they would have done so.

P. 56, l. 878, With guile he hath slain.]—So the MSS. The Chorus have already a faint feeling, quickly suppressed, that there may be another side to Orestes' action. Most editors alter the text to mean "He hath slain these guileful ones."

P. 58, l. 900, It shames me, yet God knows I hunger sore.]—To treat the dead with respect was one of the special marks of a Greek as opposed to a barbarian. It is possible that the body of Aegisthus might legitimately have been refused burial, or even nailed on a cross as Orestes in a moment of excitement suggests. But to insult him lying dead would be a shock to all Greek feeling. ("Unholy is the voice of loud thanksgiving over slaughtered men," *Odyssey* xxii. 412.) Any excess of this kind, any violence towards the helpless, was apt to rouse "The sleeping wrath of the world." There was a Greek proverb, "Even an injured dog has his Erinys"—*i.e.*, his unseen guardian or avenger. It is interesting, though

not surprising, to hear that men had little love for Electra. The wonderful speech that follows, though to a conventional Greek perhaps the most outrageous thing of which she is guilty, shows best the inherent nobility of her character before years of misery had "killed her soul within."

P. 59, ll. 928 f., Being in falseness one, &c.]—The Greek here is very obscure and almost certainly corrupt.

P. 61, l. 964, 'Tis my mother comes.]—The reaction has already begun in Orestes. In the excitement and danger of killing his enemy he has shown coolness and courage, but now a work lies before him vastly more horrible, a little more treacherous, and with no element of daring to redeem it. Electra, on the other hand, has done nothing yet; she has merely tried, not very successfully, to revile the dead body, and her hate is unsatisfied. Besides, one sees all through the play that Aegisthus was a kind of odious stranger to her; it was the woman, her mother, who came close to her and whom she really hated.

P. 63, l. 979, Was it some fiend of Hell?]—The likeness to *Hamlet* is obvious. ("The spirit that I have seen May be the Devil." End of Act II.)

P. 63, l. 983, How shall it be then, the same stealthy blow? . . .]—He means, I think, "the same as that with which I have already murdered an unsuspecting man to-day," but Electra for her own purposes misinterprets him.

P. 64, l. 990, God's horsemen, stars without a stain.]—Cf. above, ll. 312, 746. Castor and Polydeuces were sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen, and half-brothers of Clytemnestra, whose father was the mortal Tyndareus. They lived as knights without reproach, and afterwards became stars and demigods. The story is told that originally Castor was mortal and Polydeuces immortal; but when Castor was fatally wounded Polydeuces prayed

that he might be allowed to give him half his immortality. The prayer was granted; and the two live as immortals, yet, in some mysterious way, knowing the taste of death. Unlike the common sinners and punishers of the rest of the play, these Heroes find their "glory" in saving men from peril and suffering, especially at sea, where they appear as the globes of light, called St. Elmo's fire, upon masts and yards.

Pp. 64–71, ll. 998 ff.]—Clytemnestra. "And what sort of woman is this doomed and 'evil' Queen? We know the majestic murderess of Aeschylus, so strong as to be actually beautiful, so fearless and unrepentant that one almost feels her to be right. One can imagine also another figure that would be theatrically effective—a 'sympathetic' sinner, beautiful and penitent, eager to redeem her sin by self-sacrifice. But Euripides gives us neither. Perhaps he believed in neither. It is a piteous and most real character that we have here, in this sad middle-aged woman, whose first words are an apology; controlling quickly her old fires, anxious to be as little hated as possible. She would even atone, one feels, if there were any safe way of atonement; but the consequences of her old actions are holding her, and she is bound to persist. . . . In her long speech it is scarcely to Electra that she is chiefly speaking; it is to the Chorus, perhaps to her own bondmaids; to any or all of the people whose shrinking so frets her." (*Independent Review*, *l.c.*)

P. 65, l. 1011, Cast his child away.]—The Greek fleet assembled for Troy was held by contrary winds at Aulis, in the Straits of Euboea, and the whole expedition was in danger of breaking up. The prophets demanded a human sacrifice, and Agamemnon gave his own daughter, Iphigenîa. He induced Clytemnestra to send her to him, by the pretext that Achilles had asked for her in marriage.

P. 66, l. 1046, Which led me to the men he hated.]—It made Clytemnestra's crime worse, that her accomplice was the blood-foe.

Pp. 65–68. As elsewhere in Euripides, these two speeches leave the matter undecided. He does not attempt to argue the case out. He gives us a flash of light, as it were, upon Clytemnestra's mind and then upon Electra's. Each believes what she is saying, and neither understands the whole truth. It is clear that Clytemnestra, being left for ten years utterly alone, and having perhaps something of Helen's temperament about her, naturally fell in love with the Lord of a neighbouring castle; and having once committed herself, had no way of saving her life except by killing her husband, and afterwards either killing or keeping strict watch upon Orestes and Electra. Aegisthus, of course, was deliberately plotting to carry out his blood-feud and to win a great kingdom.

P. 72, l. 1156, For the flying heart too fond.]—The text is doubtful, but this seems to be the literal translation, and the reference to Clytemnestra is intelligible enough.

P. 73, l. 1157, The giants' cloud-capped ring.]—The great walls of Mycenae, built by the Cyclôpes; cf. *Trojan Women*, p. 64, "Where the towers of the giants shine O'er Argos cloudily."

P. 75, l. 1201, Back, back in the wind and rain.]—The only explicit moral judgment of the Chorus; cf. note on l. 878.

P. 77, l. 1225, I touched with my hand thy sword.]—*i.e.*, Electra dropped her own sword in horror, then in a revulsion of feeling laid her hand upon Orestes' sword—out of generosity, that he might not bear his guilt alone.

P. 78, l. 1241, An Argive ship.]—This may have been the ship of Menelaus, which was brought to Argos by Castor and Polydeuces, see l. 1278, *Helena*

1663. The ships labouring in the "Sicilian sea" (p. 82, l. 1347) must have suggested to the audience the ships of the great expedition against Sicily, then drawing near to its destruction. The Athenian fleet was destroyed early in September 413 B.C.: this play was probably produced in the spring of the same year, at which time the last reinforcements were being sent out.

P. 78, l. 1249.]—Marriage of Pylades and Electra. A good example of the essentially historic nature of Greek tragedy. No one would have invented a marriage between Electra and Pylades for the purposes of this play. It is even a little disturbing. But it is here, because it was a fixed fact in the tradition (cf. *Iphigenia in Tauris*, l. 915 ff.), and could not be ignored. Doubtless there were people living who claimed descent from Pylades and Electra.

P. 79, l. 1253, Scourge thee as a burning wheel.]—At certain feasts a big wheel soaked in some inflammable resin or tar was set fire to and rolled down a mountain.

P. 79, l. 1258, There is a hill in Athens.]—The great fame of the Areopagus as a tribunal for manslaying (see Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) cannot have been due merely to its incorruptibility. Hardly any Athenian tribunal was corruptible. But the Areopagus in very ancient times seems to have superseded the early systems of "blood-feud" or "blood-debt" by a humane and rational system of law, taking account of intention, provocation, and the varying degrees of guilt. The Erinyes, being the old Pelasgian avengers of blood, now superseded, have their dwelling in a cavern underneath the Areopagus.

P. 80, ll. 1276 ff.]—The graves of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra actually existed in Argos (Paus. ii. 16, 7). They form, so to speak, the concrete material fact round which the legend of this play circles (cf. Ridgeway in *Hellenic Journal*, xxiv. p. xxxix.).

P. 80, l. 1280.]—Helen. The story here adumbrated is taken from Stesichorus, and forms the plot of Euripides' play *Helena* (cf. Herodotus, ii. 113 ff.).

P. 80, l. 1295, I also, sons of Tyndareus.] — Observe that Electra claims the gods as cousins (cf. p. 22, l. 313), addressing them by the name of their mortal father. The Chorus has called them "sons of Zeus." In the same spirit she faces the gods, complains, and even argues, while Orestes never raises his eyes to them.

P. 80, l. 1300.]—Kêres. The death-spirits that flutter over our heads, as Homer says, "innumerable, whom no man can fly nor hide from."

P. 82, l. 1329, Yea, our peace is riven by the strange pain of these that die.]—Cf. the attitude of Artemis at the end of the *Hippolytus*. Sometimes Euripides introduces gods whose peace is not riven, but then they are always hateful. (Cf. Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, Athena in the *Trojan Women*.)

P. 82, l. 1336, O faithful unto death.]—This is the last word we hear of Electra, and it is interesting. With all her unlovely qualities it remains true that she was faithful—faithful to the dead and the absent, and to what she looked upon as a fearful duty.

Additional Note on the presence of the Argive women during the plot against the King and Queen. (Cf. especially p. 19, l. 272, These women hear us.) —It would seem to us almost mad to speak so freely before the women. But one must observe: 1. Stasis, or civil enmity, ran very high in Greece, and these women were of the party that hated Aegisthus. 2. There runs all through Euripides a very strong conception of the cohesiveness of women, their secretiveness, and their faithfulness to one another. Medea, Iphigenia, and Creusa, for instance, trust

their women friends with secrets involving life and death, and the secrets are kept. On the other hand, when a man—Xuthus in the *Ion*—tells the Chorus women a secret, they promptly and with great courage betray him. Aristophanes leaves the same impression; and so do many incidents in Greek history. Cf. the murders plotted by the Athenian women (Hdt. v. 87), and both by and against the Lemnian women (Hdt. vi. 138). The subject is a large one, but I would observe: 1. Athenian women were kept as a rule very much together, and apart from men. 2. At the time of the great invasions the women of a community must often have been of different race from the men; and this may have started a tradition of behaviour. 3. Members of a subject (or disaffected) nation have generally this cohesiveness: in Ireland, Poland, and parts of Turkey the details of a political crime will, it is said, be known to a whole country side, but not a whisper come to the authorities.

Of course the mere mechanical fact that the Chorus had to be present on the stage counts for something. It saved the dramatist trouble to make his heroine confide in the Chorus. But I do not think Euripides would have used this situation so often unless it had seemed to him both true to life and dramatically interesting.

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